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Women in love : eight studies in sentime

WOMEN IN LOVE

ALFRED SUTRO

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To Florentine Porter
from her affectionate cousin
Alfred Porter

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WOMEN IN LOVE

EIGHT STUDIES IN SENTIMENT

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WOMEN IN LOVE

EIGHT STUDIES IN SENTIMENT

BY

ALFRED SUTRO

AUTHOR OF "THE CAVE OF ILLUSION"

LONDON

GEORGE ALLEN, 156, CHARING CROSS ROAD

1902

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THE CORRECT THING

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THE CORRECT THING

SCENE.—*The drawing-room of a pleasant little house that lies hidden away in a St. John's Wood garden. Its atmosphere is exceedingly bright and cheerful: the furniture and pictures, curtains and hangings, all bearing evidence of artistic and tasteful selection. A semi-grand piano, with a harp by its side, occupies one corner: in another a revolving bookcase stands, laden with books, whose covers proclaim them of a somewhat serious nature, while others fill various little dainty shelves let into the wall. An old-fashioned writing-desk stands by the window. On a small table, in the centre of the room, supper is laid for two. A bright fire burns in the grate. The hour is close upon midnight.*

A cab stops outside; a latchkey is heard in the street-door, and after a moment HON. D'ARCY GALBRAITH *and* KITTY

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BELLAMY *enter. They are both in evening dress.* MR. GALBRAITH *is a tall, good-looking, clear-eyed man of forty; clean-shaven, with black hair slightly tinged with grey at the temples.* MISS BELLAMY *is a fragile creature of twenty-five; an exquisitely handsome brunette, with dark, flashing eyes. Her dress, beneath her long opera-cloak, is exceedingly tasteful in its extreme simplicity; cut rather high, but revealing a full white neck. She wears no jewels, but has a spray of lilies in her bodice.*

KITTY.

I told Lizzie to lay supper in here, D'Arcy, as the light has gone wrong in the dining-room. I'll just take my things off—I shan't be a minute.

(*She passes through the opposite door into an inner room;* GALBRAITH, *who appears to be controlling intense nervousness, goes to the table, pours some whiskey into a glass, and tosses it off.* KITTY *returns.*)

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KITTY.

Sit down, Dardar. It's funny having supper in here, isn't it? You open the champagne while I carve the lobster.

GALBRAITH.

I don't care about champagne to-night, Kitty—and you never do.

KITTY.

What will you drink, dear?

GALBRAITH.

I'll have some whiskey.

KITTY.

All right—is there any soda? Oh, that silly old Lizzie! Ring, dear, will you? She has not gone to bed.

GALBRAITH.

[*Gets up and rings.*] She's growing more and more forgetful.

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KITTY.

Yes—but she's such a dear old thing! And there's nothing she wouldn't do for me.

(LIZZIE *comes in; she is an old, grey-haired woman, with a hard, but not unpleasing face.*)

KITTY.

You've forgotten the soda, Lizzie—and I wonder whether you could make me some tea?

LIZZIE.

The kettle's on the hob, m'm.

KITTY.

Oh then do, please. (LIZZIE *goes.*) Here's your lobster, D'Arcy.

GALBRAITH.

[*Taking the plate.*] Thanks. Are you going to take tea at this hour?

KITTY.

Oh yes—it doesn't do me any harm.—What a stupid piece that was, Dardar.

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GALBRAITH.

Yes.

KITTY.

Do you know, it always seems to me that men who write plays don't really understand women at all.

GALBRAITH.

That's rather sweeping.

KITTY.

There are exceptions, of course—Shakespeare and all that—but I mean the modern plays one sees. There's Ibsen—but then his people are different from any one has ever met. Our own men always divide women into good and bad—and that's foolish, isn't it?

GALBRAITH.

[*Absently toying with his fork.*] How would you divide them?

KITTY.

Into women who love and women who don't. That's the true test—don't you

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think? A woman who loves must be good — or something else that means the same thing. I'm good — though no play-writing man would ever believe it. He would only make me sickly sentimental.

(LIZZIE *enters with a syphon of soda-water, and a cup of tea, etc., which she places respectively before* GALBRAITH *and* KITTY.)

Thank you, Lizzie. (LIZZIE *goes.*) Some more salad, D'Arcy?

GALBRAITH.

No, thanks.

KITTY.

There's Mrs. Green, for instance—that woman next door. She looks scornfully at me when we pass, because she's married and I'm not. She makes her husband utterly miserable, she's for ever scolding her children, and no servant will stay with her. Well, it's absurd to think that she's better than I, isn't it?

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GALBRAITH.

Of course.

KITTY.

If I had been married——

GALBRAITH.

[*Nervously.*] You're eating nothing, Kitty.

KITTY.

I'm not hungry. *You* don't seem to have much appetite, either.

GALBRAITH.

No. The theatre was so stuffy.

KITTY.

[*Rising.*] Come then: let's sit by the fire. Bring your whiskey.

(*He takes the armchair by the fire; she nestles on the floor beside him, leaning her head against his knee.*)

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KITTY.

Dardar, Mr. Jackman came into the box while you were out.

GALBRAITH.

[*Indifferently.*] Did he?

KITTY.

Yes.—Do you know, I wish we didn't see quite so much of him.

GALBRAITH.

[*Quickly.*] Why?

KITTY.

He's a very good fellow, of course—and I don't dislike him—one can't—but, latterly —during the last two or three weeks—I don't know—it has seemed to me once or twice as if——

GALBRAITH.

[*Restlessly.*] There's no harm in Jackman, Kitty——

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KITTY.

Oh no—only—well, of course, he's rather stupid—and I've an uncomfortable sort of idea that . . . he's . . . fond of me . . .

GALBRAITH.

[*Growing more and more fidgety.*] What makes you think that?

KITTY.

It's not that he *says* anything, Dardar, but he *looks*—devotion. It may be my fancy, of course—but I don't think it is. And I don't like it. I made up my mind to tell you. You might intimate to him, gently—put it down to my caprice, anything you please—but really, I would rather not see him again —for a year or two——

GALBRAITH.

[*Uneasily.*] You're a bit hard on poor old Jackman, aren't you?

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KITTY.

[*Surprised.*] Why, Dardar, I thought you'd be furious!

GALBRAITH.

Oh—knowing you—both——

KITTY.

That's true, of course. Some women, I suppose, would be pleased at men falling in love with them. I'm not. And I think that—as things are—Mr. Jackman should have been particularly careful—to hide . . . O Dardar, it hurts me!

GALBRAITH.

My dear——

KITTY.

I'm foolish, of course—but it does, it does, it hurts me. . . . O sweetheart, you could make me so happy!

GALBRAITH.

I?

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KITTY.

We've been . . . living together . . . five years, you and I. . . . And I've tried to . . . educate myself . . . and make myself . . . worthier . . . haven't I?

GALBRAITH.

[*Amazed.*] Worthier, Kitty? Of what?

KITTY.

Don't you know? Don't you feel it? When you kiss me, don't my lips say it? I'm your mistress, Dardar . . . I am not your wife.

(GALBRAITH *is completely taken by surprise; he stares at* KITTY, *and mutters "My God" beneath his breath.*)

KITTY.

[*Raising herself on her knees, and passing her arms round his neck.*] Do you remember, at Ostende, last year, how proud you were of me? When we met that old

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French poet and his wife, and they asked to be allowed to sit at our table? And he said that few women in Paris understood his writings as well as I did? Weren't we glad? I didn't disgrace you, did I? Of course, when we first lived together, I was merely an ignorant country girl. But I've worked very hard, these five years. And I'm sure no one would take me for—would they?

GALBRAITH.

[*At an utter loss.*] My dear child—Kitty——

KITTY.

Have you never thought of it, Dardar? Oh, when you and I are on the river—and we pass people you know—and the ladies pointedly look away—while the men stare hard at me—aren't you sorry for your poor little girl?—When we're abroad, and you write "Mr. and Mrs. D'Arcy Galbraith" on the hotel register—oh, it makes me so happy! I steal into the hall when I have a

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chance, and read it to myself, "Mr. and Mrs. D'Arcy Galbraith!"

GALBRAITH.

[*In despair.*] Kitty, Kitty!

KITTY.

Darling?

GALBRAITH.

I had no idea that you felt like this——

KITTY.

Well, of course, I've not let you see . . . I don't know why I told you to-night. . . Because of Mr. Jackman, I suppose. . . But the world is very cruel—and education has only made it harder. I'm D'Arcy Galbraith's . . . mistress. There's not a mother in London would let her daughter shake hands with me. I belong to a . . . class.

GALBRAITH.

[*Clearing his throat.*] Kitty——

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KITTY.

Your family would cut you, of course—but then, you're not very devoted to your family. And you've often told me you'd rather be here than anywhere else in the world. What happy evenings we have together, just you and I. . . . O Dardar, to be your wife!

(*She buries her head on his shoulder; he is excessively distressed: at last he gently disentangles himself and tries to rise. She holds him back.*)

KITTY.

It can't be, I know—but yet. . . . Think what it means to me, Dardar, not to have one woman friend! That sweet little Mrs. Macalister—do you remember—when her husband learned who I was he made a dreadful scene! . . . . No—if I want friends I must choose them from among women of . . . my class. . . . Think what that means, Dardar!

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GALBRAITH.

You're making me terribly unhappy.

KITTY.

I'm sorry, dear; I'm sorry I said anything. . . . But it *is* hard, isn't it? I'm twenty-five: I've never done any one any harm. I came up from the country as innocent a girl as could be. . . . I was foolish, of course. . . . Marriage, to me, meant spending one's life with a carpenter or footman, like my sisters at home. . . . And I loved you so dearly! . . . No wife could have loved her husband more. . . .

GALBRAITH.

[*Rising.*] Kitty, Kitty—I—I really scarcely know what to say. Of course we have been very happy together——

KITTY.

Have been, Dardar?

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GALBRAITH.

[*With an effort.*] And are—but marriage —is impossible.

KITTY.

[*Sadly.*] Is it, Dardar?

GALBRAITH.

[*Wiping his forehead.*] Marriage—after all —is a—mere convention. And there are—prejudices—that—you see—I mean——

KITTY.

[*Wistfully.*] I'm sorry I spoke about this, dear. You must forgive me——

GALBRAITH.

[*With growing nervousness.*] I assure you —I hadn't—the faintest idea. In fact I—imagined—that you were not—quite—as fond of me——

KITTY.

You're saying that to tease me, of course. Fond of you! I'll never bother you again,

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dear. Oh, I've not forgotten what you said to me, five years ago, before—You were very honest and frank. . . . But I loved you. . . . The prospect seemed Heaven to me. . . . And even now I would rather be as I am . . . your . . . mistress . . . and having your love, than be married to a king. For you're all the world to me, Dardar, and the rest doesn't really matter.

GALBRAITH.

[*With his hand to his head, muttering to himself.*] To-night of all nights!

KITTY.

And of course I understand how much Society, family—and all that—must mean to you. . . . You shall forget what I said—and don't let it worry you. I'll never speak of it again. Only . . . who knows whether the time will not come . . . in some years perhaps . . . when it will be *you* who will . . . reopen the subject?

GALBRAITH.

[*With a mighty effort.*] Listen——

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KITTY.

[*Playfully.*] Oh, you wait and see! We won't talk about it any more. And you mustn't think I'm unhappy. How could I be—with you!

(*She flings her arms round his neck, and kisses him tenderly on the lips.* GALBRAITH *submits uncomfortably.* LIZZIE *comes in with a letter.*)

LIZZIE.

A letter for you, m'm.

KITTY.

[*Surprised.*] A letter?

LIZZIE.

Yes, m'm—a man has just brought it. There was no answer, he said.

(LIZZIE *goes;* KITTY *takes the letter and looks at it.*)

KITTY.

It's Mr. Jackman's writing.

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GALBRAITH.

[*Startled.*] Jackman?

KITTY.

What can he have to say to me—at this hour in the morning?

(*She tears open the letter, glances at it, and starts to her feet with a wild cry.*)

GALBRAITH.

What's the matter?

KITTY.

[*In agony.*] O God! O God!

(*The letter falls to the ground:* GALBRAITH *picks it up and looks at it.*)

GALBRAITH.

The cursed fool!

(KITTY *stands before him, her eyes burning.*)

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KITTY.

D'Arcy! D'Arcy!

(*He turns away; she takes the letter from his hand.*)

KITTY.

[*Reading.*] "It is one o'clock. Galbraith will by this time have told you of his impending marriage. You will remember that you have no more devoted friend than Arthur Jackman."

GALBRAITH.

The ass! The dolt!

KITTY.

[*Dully.*] Marriage? You?

GALBRAITH.

Listen.

KITTY.

You are going to be married? You are going to leave me?

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GALBRAITH.

I must.

KITTY.

[*Wildly.*] Dardar, Dardar, you can't—you can't! It's not true! Say it's not true!

(*He is silent, and for a moment they stand face to face, she looking passionately at him, with the tears streaming down her cheeks; he, with bent head, his eyes fixed on the floor.*)

GALBRAITH.

Listen—I've been asked—to stand—for the House. You know—how politics—interest me.—The woman—I intend—to marry——

KITTY.

[*With a cry.*] You're engaged to her?

GALBRAITH.

Yes.

(KITTY *sinks to the floor:* GALBRAITH *goes quickly up to her: with an imploring*

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gesture she waves him aside, and lies huddled on the ground, moaning piteously. He walks to and fro, his eyes filled with tears, not knowing what to say, or do. Once or twice he stands by her: her hand is pressed to her side: she moans and sobs. At last he touches her, and tries to take her hand—her whole body shivers.)

GALBRAITH.

[*Gently.*] Kitty.

KITTY.

Yes, yes . . . wait . . . wait. . . .

(*She struggles desperately to control herself: she feels blindly for the arm of the chair, and lifts herself into it. She dries her eyes; but broken sobs still come from her, and the tears stream down her cheeks.*)

KITTY.

I am sorry . . . that I have . . distressed you. . . . It was . . . the shock. . . .

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GALBRAITH.

[*Timidly.*] I had not been here so often of late—I thought you would——

KITTY.

Never, never—I had no suspicion—O God! none.

GALBRAITH.

[*Desperately.*] Listen. You must try to be brave. I feel a terrible brute. I am, perhaps. But don't judge me too harshly. I'm forty-one—ambitious. There are wheels within wheels. In order to succeed in politics —I must be—married.

KITTY.

[*Feebly.*] And this—woman——?

GALBRAITH.

Her father has very great influence.

KITTY.

And you won't . . . see me . . . again . . . ?

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GALBRAITH.

You and I are too honest to——

KITTY.

[*Breaking down utterly.*] Not see me again! Not see me again!

(*She bursts into helpless tears:* GALBRAITH *has mastered himself, and speaks doggedly and determinedly.*)

GALBRAITH.

Kitty, you said before that I had been—honest—with you. I had. It's the awful misfortune—of a life like ours—that it has to come to an end.

KITTY.

[*Sobbing softly.*] You don't love me any more?

GALBRAITH.

It's not that—it's merely that I am ambitious. It seems horribly cruel, I know. You spoke of my marrying you.

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That would spell ruin for me. In one way, of course, I should be infinitely happier. But it can't be. I should be shutting every door in my face.

KITTY.

. . . Yes. . . .

GALBRAITH.

I will never forget you—or the happy years we have spent together. But I have another side—I suppose all men have. Love doesn't play the same part, perhaps, in a man's life. Or it may be that I haven't much heart—I don't know. You wouldn't wish to have me here with you, always lamenting lost opportunities? You wouldn't wish to feel that you had stopped me? There could be no happiness for either of us—that way.

KITTY.

[*The tears still pouring down her face.*]
. . . No. . . .

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GALBRAITH.

I had a very great struggle — before I could make up my mind. This last month I've only been here—three or four times—I thought that would—pave the way. . . . But anyhow we must be brave, both of us. Don't make it too hard for me, Kitty!

KITTY.

No . . . I'll try. . . . But, D'Arcy, we won't say . . . good-bye . . . to-night. . . . Come here to-morrow, will you?

GALBRAITH.

Yes.

KITTY.

And can't we be friends? Can't you see me—just once a month, say? Your wife couldn't object—to that? If we only just meet—and shake hands?

GALBRAITH.

That shall be as you will.

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KITTY.

You have your future, of course—you will go into the world, begin a new life—while I—never mind. . . . You see I am trying to be brave. . . . What a fool you must have thought me . . . before. . . .

GALBRAITH.

It cut me to the heart, Kitty.

KITTY.

I have no other side, you see: I only can love . . . and I . . . have loved. . . . Well, there it is. . . . You had better go now, dear. . . . You will come to-morrow?

GALBRAITH.

Yes.—But we may as well get over the—unpleasant part of it—now. There are some—business details.

KITTY.

Business?

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GALBRAITH.

[*Hurriedly.*] Yes.—I've paid five hundred pounds into your account at the Bank. The furniture of the house is yours, of course. My solicitors will pay the rent——

KITTY.

Your solicitors?

GALBRAITH.

[*Uncomfortably.*] Oh, that's the—er—yes—they will pay it. And remit you seventy-five pounds every quarter.

KITTY.

That's much more than I shall need, D'Arcy.

GALBRAITH.

Not a bit. I'd make the allowance bigger—only you know I'm not rich. And if ever you wanted anything, of course you'd apply to me.

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KITTY.

You're very generous. . . . I shall need very little. . . . I don't know what I shall do. . . . I shall have to do something. . . . You have been very kind and thoughtful. . . .

GALBRAITH.

Don't say that—it whips me in the face. I can't tell you how — sorry — I feel. When we're young we do things rashly, without thinking of what will happen.

KITTY.

There was no . . . mention of . . . marriage . . . when I came to . . . live with you. . . . You are not to blame. . . .

GALBRAITH.

I feel very mean and contemptible, Kitty——

KITTY.

You needn't . . . I see things, now. . . . It never occurred to me that I was . . .

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hampering . . . you. Go now, D'Arcy. . . . You will come to-morrow, and we will say good-bye. . . . Go now, dear.

(*He turns and fidgets, makes a half-movement towards her, then goes. She sits as though stunned: when the door closes, she lifts her hand to her head, and finds the letter still clenched in her fingers. She looks at it mechanically. Suddenly she starts to her feet, shouting "D'Arcy, D'Arcy!" He comes in, with his overcoat on, holding his hat in his hand.*)

GALBRAITH.

Yes?

KITTY.

[*Trembling.*] This letter?

GALBRAITH.

Well?

KITTY.

How . . . did he . . . know?

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GALBRAITH.

Know?

KITTY.

[*Feverishly.*] That you were going . . . to tell me . . . to-night?

(GALBRAITH *is thunderstruck, and finds no words.*)

KITTY.

[*Wildly.*] How did he know?

GALBRAITH.

[*Stammering.*] I——

KITTY.

You actually told—Mr.—Jackman?

GALBRAITH.

[*Floundering.*] He has been—very intimate—here; and I thought you'd be—lonely—and——

KITTY.

[*Shrieking in horror.*] O God, not that!

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Don't let me suspect that! D'Arcy, look at me! D'Arcy, D'Arcy! You can't! Oh!

(*She stands before him, her wild eyes, dry now, fixed on his face. He makes a desperate effort, but cannot meet her glance.*)

GALBRAITH.

[*Violently.*] I don't know what you mean. All I intended was——

KITTY.

That I, who had been your mistress, should become the mistress of your friend!

GALBRAITH.

No, no—no——

KITTY.

You are lying to me. That was your hope.

GALBRAITH.

It was not. I thought you'd be lonely. I thought you liked Jackman. Beyond that I had no idea——

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KITTY.

Coward, coward!

(*She sobs no longer—her eyes are strangely bright. Suddenly she goes to the desk, seizes a cheque-book, and feverishly writes a cheque.*)

GALBRAITH.

[*Vehemently.*] You have no right to suspect me—none, none.

KITTY.

[*Returning to him.*] Here. Take back your five hundred pounds. The furniture is yours, not mine. Your solicitors need not pay the rent, or the allowance. I will cost you nothing in future, Mr. Galbraith.

GALBRAITH.

[*Refusing the cheque.*] This is monstrous. I——

KITTY.

You thought I was like the others? Your friends' mistresses consoled themselves—so why not I? I!

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GALBRAITH.

[*Passionately.*] Will you listen to me?

KITTY.

You have said all—all. You won't take the cheque? Very well, I will tell the people at the Bank that the money is yours. Please go now, Mr. Galbraith. I leave this house to-morrow.

GALBRAITH.

You are doing me a most abominable injustice——

KITTY.

Why? You did the "correct thing." There are such women. You intended to marry—and your friend Mr. Jackman was willing—to relieve you of me.

GALBRAITH.

Kitty, I never——

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KITTY.

And in two or three years he would hand me to some one else; and so on, till I was too old—for the next man to care for me. . . . O D'Arcy, D'Arcy—you could think of this life for the woman who loved you!

GALBRAITH.

I swear by all I hold sacred——

KITTY.

Don't. You know, and I know. It was in your eyes. In good time, you thought, this would happen. Good-bye. And have no fear—I shall not kill myself. I shall work. I leave to-morrow. Good-bye.

GALBRAITH.

[*Appealing.*] Kitty——

KITTY.

Go, go. We have nothing more to say to each other.

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GALBRAITH.

[*Violently.*] I cannot leave you like this—I will not——

(*He moves towards her:* KITTY *eludes him, runs to the door, and cries "Lizzie, Lizzie!" After a moment* LIZZIE *comes in.*)

KITTY.

Open the door for Mr. Galbraith.

(LIZZIE *stares at them both, opens the door;* GALBRAITH *sinks his head and goes without a word.* LIZZIE *follows him into the hall; the outer door is heard to close;* LIZZIE *returns, and looks wonderingly at her mistress.* KITTY *suddenly bursts into a flood of passionate tears and throws her arms round the old woman's neck.*)

KITTY.

O Lizzie, Lizzie!

CURTAIN.

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THE GUTTER OF TIME

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THE GUTTER OF TIME

SCENE.—*The drawing-room of* MRS. TRANSFORD'S *flat in San Francisco. The garish and tasteless appointments are of the kind usually to be found in apartments that are let furnished. Endeavours have however been made, and not wholly without success, to tone down the prevailing vulgarity by means of a few good prints and photographs on the walls, a few pleasant draperies; on the small table, by the side of a china tea-service, stands a bowl filled with exquisite roses.*

MRS. TRANSFORD *is seated in a low rocking-chair, close to the little table, reading a paper-covered novel. She wears an exceedingly pretty tea-gown, cut rather low at the neck; and as she sways up and down bewildering frills and flounces rush tumultuously over her shoes. She is a very handsome woman: no longer young, but preserving admirably the semblance of youth. Her face,*

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seen in repose, looks hard and stern; there are lines about the mouth and eyes that tell of much sorrow and bitterness; but her expression, when she is speaking and smiling, becomes exceedingly attractive.

The door opens, and SIR HARRY JARDINE *enters. He is a very young man, almost a boy: tall, square-shouldered, vigorous, with a frank and pleasant face.* MRS. TRANSFORD *looks up, smiles, and holds out her hand, which he takes eagerly and presses in his.*

MRS. TRANSFORD.

How nice of you to come! I was so bored!

SIR HARRY.

I hope you won't mind my inflicting myself upon you again——

MRS. TRANSFORD.

Again? Oh yes, you came yesterday, didn't you? And the day before? Well, I

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grant absolution. I've been reading a novel, and could not, for the life of me, feel the slightest interest in hero, heroine, or author. Sit down. You shall have some tea. Would you mind touching the bell? Thank you. What have you been doing to-day?

SIR HARRY.

[*Sitting.*] Oh—lounging about——

MRS. TRANSFORD.

That must have been very difficult. America's a big place, but you have to go to the prairies if you want to lounge. Every one's in a desperate hurry here—except in fiction. I've skimmed through two hundred pages of this book, but nothing has happened yet. And just think what happens in two hundred pages of our own life!

SIR HARRY.

If another person could read those pages, he wouldn't find them exciting perhaps.

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MRS. TRANSFORD.

That's true enough: and the first chapters are always dull. Tragic, too, in a way. We carry our fairy godmother in our pocket, and don't know it, and nobody tells us.

SIR HARRY.

If they did, we shouldn't believe it.

MRS. TRANSFORD.

Oh no, that's in the scheme of things. We were not meant to be happy, of course, so it was playfully contrived that we should be very foolish when we were young, and afterward acquire just sufficient wisdom to know what fools we have been. Would you mind touching that bell again? Our nigger's very dignified: he only comes at the second call.

SIR HARRY.

[*Rings.*] Don't you think we were meant to be happy?

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MRS. TRANSFORD.

Perhaps—as the twenty-storey houses here were meant to be beautiful — but they're not, are they? The architect no doubt has the best intentions — but there are so many interests to consider! Ah — here he comes.

(*A black servant enters, with a kettle: he pours the water into the little teapot on the table.*)

MRS. TRANSFORD.

Water boiling, Tom?

TOM.

Yes, missis, sure. (*He goes.*)

MRS. TRANSFORD.

[*Peering into the teapot.*] It probably isn't, you know. The chief moral distinction between the black and the white is that the former will lie for the mere pleasure of lying. Now I don't think we do. We lie under protest, and, very often, would rather tell the truth.

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SIR HARRY.

Why do you say such things? I am sure you always tell the truth.

MRS. TRANSFORD.

I do to some people, of course. It's a luxury, and one feels frightfully extravagant. You have been here every day this week: I shall have to economise severely for the next month or two. (*She pours out the tea, hands* HARRY *a cup, and tastes her own.*) No, as I thought—the water was *not* boiling.

SIR HARRY.

[*Drinking.*] It's very good tea.

MRS. TRANSFORD.

The tea's all right—but if Providence *will* let the water be tepid——

SIR HARRY.

I'd drink ditch-water with relish, if you poured it out for me.

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MRS. TRANSFORD.

[*Smiling.*] You say these things very glibly —I suppose you've said them very often before?

SIR HARRY.

You know better than that. I'm not that sort of man. I'm by way of being athletic, you know. I took my blue at the 'Varsity.

MRS. TRANSFORD.

Oh, really? Cricket?

SIR HARRY.

Yes: and I'm fond of all sport. Well, that keeps you from being a ladies' man.

MRS. TRANSFORD.

[*Dreamily.*] I should like to see the match at Lord's again. . . .

SIR HARRY.

You haven't been home for a long time?

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MRS. TRANSFORD.

It's rather pretty of you to talk of England as my home. No, not for a great many years.

SIR HARRY.

And are you never home-sick?

MRS. TRANSFORD.

Home-sick, heart-sick, sick of everything except the sea, which is beautifully clean and deep. I'm a great swimmer, you know.

SIR HARRY.

Are you though? I do a bit that way myself.

MRS. TRANSFORD.

We'll go for a swim together some day, perhaps. It's my one happy time. There's no nonsense about the sea. Leave off swimming, it says to you: just fold your arms and cross your legs, and *I'll* do the rest. I let myself go down sometimes—down, down, down—and there's a great green wall

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round you, and you're a million miles from the earth—and then suddenly your heart goes thumping, and you're deliciously afraid: and you throw up your hands and rise—oh, so slowly, so slowly!—and at last, with a bubble and splash, you get to the surface, and draw a long breath; and the sun's shining on you, and people are near—and you feel that the sea's rather angry—it wanted to keep you. Oh, it's great!

SIR HARRY.

That's strange. I've never felt like that.

MRS. TRANSFORD.

You don't see the angel on the waves; you don't play hide-and-seek with death.

SIR HARRY.

Why should you?

MRS. TRANSFORD.

Why indeed? But tell me about yourself. Do you shoot?

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SIR HARRY.

Rather. I don't care for pheasants, you know, and that kind of thing—I like big game, where the beast has a chance. I used to think that was the chief joy in life——

MRS. TRANSFORD.

And now?

SIR HARRY.

Now I would rather be with you. . . .

(*Having blurted this out he blushes furiously. An enigmatic smile comes over* MRS. TRANSFORD'S *face: she looks quietly at him.*)

SIR HARRY.

Please forgive my having said that. I didn't mean to—it slipped out.

MRS. TRANSFORD.

You are forgiven.

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SIR HARRY.

I—I—you see I've had rather a strange sort of life; I've met very few women. My father died when I was a baby; and my mother never got over it—they hadn't been married two years——

MRS. TRANSFORD.

You are the only child?

SIR HARRY.

Yes. And my mother shut herself up. She saw very few people.

MRS. TRANSFORD.

Lady Jardine must be quite young?

SIR HARRY.

[*With a laugh.*] Oh well, the dear old mater's about forty-two, I suppose——

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MRS. TRANSFORD.

[*Her colour deepening for an instant.*] Ah. And very devoted to you?

SIR HARRY.

Oh yes. This trip of mine was rather a blow to her—but she insisted upon it——

MRS. TRANSFORD.

You've been away a long time?

SIR HARRY.

About a year. I had six months' shooting in India.

MRS. TRANSFORD.

The Anglo-Indian ladies are very fascinating, are they not?

SIR HARRY.

I suppose so—but they didn't fascinate me. I prefer tigers.

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MRS. TRANSFORD.

Well, you must have had a very good time.

SIR HARRY.

Oh yes. I've been almost everywhere—but I like San Francisco best.

MRS. TRANSFORD.

It's a very beautiful city.

SIR HARRY.

I wasn't thinking of the city.

MRS. TRANSFORD.

Ah, of course you admire the bay. Most Englishmen fall in love with the Pacific at their first sight of it.—Tell me, have you seen my husband to-day?

SIR HARRY.

Yes—at the Club. He asked me to dine here to-morrow.

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MRS. TRANSFORD.

Ah.—What was he doing at the Club?

SIR HARRY.

Playing picquet with young Darley.

MRS. TRANSFORD.

Darley?

SIR HARRY.

The young fellow who was here at dinner the other night.

MRS. TRANSFORD.

Oh yes, I remember. His father's enormously rich. I suppose my husband was winning?

SIR HARRY.

Rather. He had a pile of gold in front of him.

MRS. TRANSFORD.

Then he'll be in a good temper to-night. Has he won much of you?

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SIR HARRY.

Oh, just a bit. I've had very bad luck, you know.

MRS. TRANSFORD.

[*Quietly.*] Most people do have bad luck when they play with my husband.

SIR HARRY.

[*Startled.*] Mrs. Transford! What *do* you mean?

MRS. TRANSFORD.

Merely that he is an exceedingly good player, and that most young men are not? Are you?

SIR HARRY.

Oh, I hate cards.

MRS. TRANSFORD.

Then why do you play?

(SIR HARRY *bites his lips, blushes, and cannot find an answer.*)

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MRS. TRANSFORD.

[*Looking steadily at him.*] Why?

SIR HARRY.

[*Fidgeting.*] Oh well—I don't know.

MRS. TRANSFORD.

You think that if you didn't play cards with the husband, you would not be allowed to come here and flirt with the wife?

SIR HARRY.

[*Starting to his feet in dismay.*] Oh, Mrs. Transford, how awfully unkind!

MRS. TRANSFORD.

Sit down, sit down. But isn't it true?

SIR HARRY.

[*Stammering.*] I——

MRS. TRANSFORD.

Have you any friends in San Francisco? I mean people to whom you have letters?

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SIR HARRY.

I haven't presented my letters.

MRS. TRANSFORD.

You have gone to your banker's?

SIR HARRY.

Yes.

MRS. TRANSFORD.

And he certainly asked you to dinner?

SIR HARRY.

[*Very uncomfortable.*] Er—yes. I wish you wouldn't——

MRS. TRANSFORD.

And in the course of conversation he will have learned that you were intimate with the Transfords. And he will have told you that the husband was a man of no private means and no occupation; once a popular actor, but who had been compelled to give up his profession owing to his having on two occasions been intoxicated on the stage.

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And that he now earned a very handsome living by playing cards with strangers—like you. Didn't he tell you this?

SIR HARRY.

[*Very unhappy.*] Oh—er——

MRS. TRANSFORD.

Did he, or did he not?

SIR HARRY.

He did.

MRS. TRANSFORD.

That's honest. But he said more than that?

SIR HARRY.

Really, Mrs. Transford!

MRS. TRANSFORD.

He also told you that the wife was of material assistance to the husband, as she was very kind to the young men whose money he won.

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SIR HARRY.

[*Hotly.*] And I said it was a lie.

MRS. TRANSFORD.

My dear friend, I hope you didn't put it quite so bluntly.

SIR HARRY.

I did though; and I got up, and left the house.

MRS. TRANSFORD.

[*Serenely.*] You owe that respectable banker an apology.

SIR HARRY.

Mrs. Transford!

MRS. TRANSFORD.

What he said was perfectly true.

SIR HARRY.

[*In dismay.*] True!

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MRS. TRANSFORD.

Our establishment is expensive; the money all comes from young men like yourself. San Francisco in the season—the watering-places, and so forth.—Don't look so scared. You may smoke, if you wish to.

SIR HARRY.

Mrs. Transford!

MRS. TRANSFORD.

My dear Harry—if you will allow me to call you Harry—I don't want you to think too badly of me either. Mr. Transford is not in the very least jealous; but my relations with his youthful friends are . . . strictly platonic.

SIR HARRY.

[*Colouring.*] There was no need to assure me of that.

MRS. TRANSFORD.

They come here and flirt with me—as you do; they tell me how glad they are to be

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with me—as you do; and they end by making love to me, as you were about to do, if I hadn't stopped you.

SIR HARRY.

[*Steadily.*] I don't think I am quite like the others.

MRS. TRANSFORD.

No: you are a very dear boy. And I assure you I have never told the "others" what I have told you. I flirt with them to their hearts' content—I let them tell me they love me till they're tired. And then they go, and make room for the next one.

SIR HARRY.

And why have you treated me differently?

MRS. TRANSFORD.

Because I . . . like you.

SIR HARRY.

[*Seizing her hand.*] Mrs. Transford!

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MRS. TRANSFORD.

[*Giving his hand a friendly squeeze and withdrawing hers.*] I am not a bad sort, you know. Your banker would not believe it, but I really am not. Life is a sorry business, but it has to be lived; and a poor devil like me can't afford to be nice as regards ways and means. A woman, you see, is very much handicapped. A man may retrieve a false step—but she—never!

SIR HARRY.

A false step. You!

MRS. TRANSFORD.

[*After a moment's pause.*] Tell me, Harry, have you ever met Lord Winthorpe in London?

SIR HARRY.

Yes: he belongs to my club. They say he's great on astronomy.

MRS. TRANSFORD.

[*Drily.*] Very. And how is he?

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SIR HARRY.

Oh, all right, I should think. He's a dry old stick.

MRS. TRANSFORD.

[*Rocking herself.*] I once had the honour of being that old stick's wife.

SIR HARRY.

[*With a violent start.*] What!!

MRS. TRANSFORD.

Yes. You see I, also, lost my father when I was a baby; I also was an only child; but it was not my fortune to have a devoted mother. Mine was exceedingly frivolous: and I saw her but seldom. My life was divided between school and the nursery. When I was eighteen she married me to Lord Winthorpe.

SIR HARRY.

She married you?

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MRS. TRANSFORD.

She looked very young, you see; and the society of a grown-up daughter could not be agreeable. So she kept me at home. I had inherited a great deal of her frivolity; and my life was so dull that, in my eagerness to escape, I married the first man who asked me. He chanced to be Lord Winthorpe.

SIR HARRY.

And you weren't happy?

MRS. TRANSFORD.

I was eighteen, he forty. I craved for society and amusement; his one delight was to look at the moon through a very long telescope. I had no children—a child might have saved me.

SIR HARRY.

Oh, I am so sorry!

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MRS. TRANSFORD.

And after three years I ran away—with Mr. Transford the actor.

(SIR HARRY *buries his face in his hands.*)

It made quite a little sensation at the time. I was what they called, in those days, a professional beauty. My photograph was in all the shop-windows. It sold, I believe, very freely—the price was only a shilling. I was giddy, flighty, and inconceivably foolish. But I had kept straight so far, and there is some merit in that, when one's husband's an astronomer. I met Mr. Transford, who made violent love to me. The women of my set all raved about him—there wasn't a grain of sense in the lot of us. He was certainly very good-looking. And I was only a doll. I had no friend to speak to me as I have spoken to you. "The world well lost for love" was my text. Mr. Transford and I went off together the night my husband discovered a new star, which was, I believe, about the size of the Isle of Wight. Don't you think it was very clever to discover so small a star?

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SIR HARRY.

[*Without raising his head.*] Oh, Mrs. Transford, Mrs. Transford!

MRS. TRANSFORD.

I'm afraid I've made you unhappy. Don't let this distress you. Shall I go on?

SIR HARRY.

Yes.

MRS. TRANSFORD.

He took me to the south of France, and at first I was vaguely flattered and pleased. I had grown so tired of the moon! But that didn't last long. I had a little money of my own—that didn't last long either.

SIR HARRY.

Do you mean to say that Mr. Transford—

MRS. TRANSFORD.

Not a penny, of course, after he had paid for the tickets. But they were very

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expensive. And so, when our money was nearly exhausted, we shipped ourselves off to New York. I fancy we both felt we had made a mistake.

SIR HARRY.

Didn't he love you?

MRS. TRANSFORD.

He? There are always footlights in an actor's soul, you know. Well, about three weeks after I had left him, it occurred to Lord Winthorpe that he hadn't seen me for a day or two. So he made inquiries. And then, in an absent-minded moment, he sent for his lawyer. The lawyer procured a divorce, of which I was duly notified. And I discovered that Mr. Transford had been absent-minded too—he had a wife in a lunatic asylum, who, by the way, is still living, and still in that asylum.

SIR HARRY.

[*Furiously.*] What a villain!

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MRS. TRANSFORD.

Oh no—it all meant so little to him! Women adored him—they are such fools—wherever he went; but then, as I said, he was very good-looking, and his manners were charming. Well, he got an engagement as star in New York; his elopement with a lady of title had made him more fashionable than ever. I was popular, too, with a certain set; but I was very unhappy. The doll shed real human tears. But, with your permission, I will draw a veil over a very long period, during which we wandered from New York to Boston, Philadelphia, Chicago, San Francisco, Australia, Canada, Africa—birds of passage, at home nowhere—Mr. Transford acting and I yawning, he making love to every woman he met, while I—we will draw that veil.

SIR HARRY.

[*Sorrowfully.*] I had no idea——

MRS. TRANSFORD.

Mr. Transford, after a time, became

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attached to a strong and rather insidious liqueur. One night there was a scene on the stage—it was hushed up; another, and his career as an actor was over. He had always been a good card-player; and for the last three years he has turned cards, and me, to account. . . . There, my dear Harry, you have the true and moving story of Helen Maddison, sometime the Countess of Winthorpe, now the nameless person who lives with Mr. Hamilton Transford, and helps him to rook his young friends.—I'm sure you would like to smoke. There's a box by your elbow.

(SIR HARRY, *white to the lips, passes the box; she takes a couple of cigarettes and hands one to him; he accepts it mechanically.*)

MRS. TRANSFORD.

Will you give me a light?

(*He strikes a match, and holds it while she lights her cigarette.*)

MRS. TRANSFORD.

You are not smoking.

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SIR HARRY.

I don't want to.

MRS. TRANSFORD.

Smoke, my dear friend, smoke. It soothes the nerves, and points a moral, where the moral is needed.

(*She strikes a match, and hands it to him; he takes it, but lets it burn to the end and throws it down.* MRS. TRANSFORD, *leaning back, her eyes fixed on the ceiling, puffs blue rings of smoke into the air.*)

MRS. TRANSFORD.

Well, I have told you, and am glad to have done it. The story isn't a pretty one, is it? But you know what you have to do. You will not come to dinner to-morrow; you will not play cards any more with Mr. Transford. . . . We two will say good-bye to-day.

SIR HARRY.

[*Doggedly.*] No.

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MRS. TRANSFORD.

My dear boy, it's sweet of you to say no; but you must. This house is not a fit place for a young and impressionable English baronet. You will leave San Francisco at once.

SIR HARRY.

I ask you to be my wife.

(MRS. TRANSFORD *gives a start of utter surprise: she turns and stares wonderingly at him.*)

You are divorced from Lord Winthorpe; you are not married to Mr. Transford. I asked you to be my wife.

(*Lights gleam in her eyes: her lips tremble: hot blood courses over her face.*)

I love you. I have never loved a woman in my life before. I never shall again. I loved you the first time I saw you. Will you be my wife, Helen?

(*He takes both her hands in his: her breath comes very quickly—she still cannot speak.*)

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SIR HARRY.

I will try to make you happy. Oh, I love you! Can you care for me a little?

(*His face is very near hers, and approaches still nearer: she frees herself gently, and turns round in her chair, away from him.*)

SIR HARRY.

[*Rising and going to her.*] Helen!

MRS. TRANSFORD.

Wait, wait. . . . Sit down—wait. . . . Oh, this is very strange!

SIR HARRY.

Why strange? Didn't you know that I loved you?

MRS. TRANSFORD.

I told you my story because . . . I liked you so much . . . because I . . . I . . .

SIR HARRY.

[*Anxiously.*] O Helen, I want you to do more than like me!

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MRS. TRANSFORD.

I do. That was why I told you.

(SIR HARRY *gives a glad cry and rushes eagerly to her—she waves him back.*)

No, no . . . the fact is . . . well, why should I not say it? Yes—I love you. I felt strangely drawn towards you the first time you came. I love you for the frank, noble boy that you are. For your faith in me, your unquestioning belief in all I have told you. And I swear to you, Harry, by . . . all the bitter tears I have shed . . . that every word . . . is true.

SIR HARRY.

Don't you think I know?

MRS. TRANSFORD.

Ah, you have tempted me, tempted me sorely! I had not a suspicion. I thought you would take your hat, and go.

SIR HARRY.

You thought that of me?

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MRS. TRANSFORD.

Why not? It would have been so natural. And you ask me to marry you! O Harry, where should we go, you and I, when we were married?

SIR HARRY.

Somewhere away from people who know us. We will begin a new life. I will make you happy, Helen.

MRS. TRANSFORD.

[*Holding out her hand, which he kisses eagerly.*] Dear Harry! It would be very beautiful. Love—for me! Oh, the temptation! Love! After the solitude, the dreariness, the squalor — the card-playing and quarrelling—to have a man by your side who loves you. . . . Love . . . love! . . . (*She suddenly turns, shakes herself, and gives a queer little laugh.*) My cigarette has gone out, Harry. Please give me another.

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SIR HARRY.

[*Refusing to release her hand.*] You have not yet said yes.

MRS. TRANSFORD.

[*With a wan smile.*] How old are you, Harry?

SIR HARRY.

[*After a moment's pause, somewhat defiantly.*] I shall be twenty-five, very soon. But I have managed my own affairs for a long time, you know.

MRS. TRANSFORD.

And . . . how old am I?

SIR HARRY.

About thirty, perhaps.

MRS. TRANSFORD.

[*Sadly.*] I am thirty-six. Mr. Transford and I have been . . . together . . . for fourteen years.

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SIR HARRY.

Do you think that makes any difference to me? You are young, you are beautiful—

MRS. TRANSFORD.

I take a very long time dressing in the morning. . . . But never mind about that. I have still a few years before me. For those few years we might be happy——

SIR HARRY.

We shall always be happy, Helen.

MRS. TRANSFORD.

Always—ah, always! And your mother, Harry? Tell me, would she be pleased . . . with her daughter-in-law?

(SIR HARRY *is silent.*)

MRS. TRANSFORD.

Well?

SIR HARRY.

No. But she is not a conventional woman. She has only to see you——

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MRS. TRANSFORD.

You think that? She has only to see me! Well—I tell you—I have reached a stage of such absolute wretchedness, the future is so horrible, life so appalling, that —if I did not love you—I would marry you without hesitation.

SIR HARRY.

[*Bewildered.*] If you did not love me!

MRS. TRANSFORD.

Yes. These fourteen years have been years of such pain: I have known so much sorrow, been dealt with so hardly, that I would seize any rope that was flung me. If any other rich man had asked me, I should probably have answered "Yes." But not to you! I can't to you!

SIR HARRY.

Oh, you are cruel!

MRS. TRANSFORD.

I can't say it to you. Because I love you.

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It is absurd for a woman to love a man so many years younger than she. But I do. I do.

(*She draws him to her, and kisses him very tenderly on the lips and eyes. He falls on his knees before her.*)

MRS. TRANSFORD.

Oh, my dear, my dear, in a very few years my hair will be turning grey, the lines on my face will show more and more clearly, age will be written upon me. And you will still be quite young. And, Harry, I should have no children, and you would want children. And the poor mother at home would break her heart, for to her, and to all the world, I should be an adventuress. Oh, this offer of yours, your faith and your love, are so precious, so splendid, that I shall hug them to me for the rest of my life. You see, I am sorely tempted: and I refuse, for your dear sake. And, in the days to come, when the darkness upon me is darker still, there will be comfort in knowing that I saved you, saved you from

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me. You will go home, you will soon forget me; dear boy, you are twenty-four; but I shall remember, for I am too old to forget. And, Harry, perhaps you have not placed your love so very unworthily after all, for the woman you love has enough love for you to refuse to drag you down with her. Oh, dear boy, don't say any more. My life is ended; yours begins. There is no hope for me, no to-morrow. When I cease to attract, Mr. Transford will send me away.

(SIR HARRY *growls and springs to his feet.*)

MRS. TRANSFORD.

[*Gently stroking his hand.*] But I promise you that whenever I want a friend I will write to you. I have your address, I will write. So far, I have not had a friend in the world. I promise you that. And the future will not be quite hopeless, after all.

SIR HARRY.

[*Hoarsely.*] You will not marry me?

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MRS. TRANSFORD.

No, dear boy, I will not. I was very near saying yes. Oh, very near. Remember it, in the days to come, when you are happy with your wife and children at home—that the desolate creature in San Francisco was very near saying yes.

SIR HARRY.

[*Passionately.*] You know that you're frightfully cruel? You talk of your age and the rest—what do these things matter to me? I love you. I am young, of course —but do you think that I ever will change? That I can forget you, or care for any one else? Helen, Helen, don't send me away?

MRS. TRANSFORD.

Hush, hush! Don't say any more. Why do I refuse, do you think? Because I know something of life, of the world, of men and women. If I said yes I should be like my husband, playing a game that I understand

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well with a mere beginner. You don't respect my husband, do you? Very soon you would not respect me.

SIR HARRY.

Helen!

MRS. TRANSFORD.

I should be your wife, but the years would divide us, those terrible eleven years. And wherever we went we should meet people who knew. There is no place in this world where one can hide. Good-bye, dear Harry. Leave San Francisco to-night. Go home. You must do as I tell you.

SIR HARRY.

[*The tears standing in his eyes, holding out his hands to her.*] Helen!

MRS. TRANSFORD.

[*Putting both her hands in his.*] Good-bye, my dear one, good-bye. Oh, I am so

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grateful to you. Good-bye. And God bless you, Harry. . . .

(*She kisses him again, slowly, tenderly, fondly; then suddenly breaks away, goes to the table, and rings.* SIR HARRY *moves eagerly towards her: the door opens, and the negro enters.*)

MRS. TRANSFORD.

Good-bye, Sir Harry.

(*With one last look at her he goes, with the negro at his heels.* MRS. TRANSFORD'S *eyes follow him till the door closes; she heaves a deep sigh, another, and, for an instant, puts her handkerchief to her eyes. Then she takes a cigarette from the box, lights it, throws herself into the rocking-chair, and rocks up and down.*)

CURTAIN.

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ELLA'S APOLOGY

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ELLA'S APOLOGY

SCENE.—DICK HARVEY'S *Studio in West Kensington. The room is large and rather scantily furnished—a few old oak chairs, an old-fashioned bureau, a platform for sitters, two or three easels. There are no pictures on the walls, but numbers of canvases, framed and unframed, are huddled together at different corners. Close to the door is a table, at which* HARVEY *is seated, writing on a large sheet of foolscap. He is a tall, handsome man of thirty-nine, carelessly, almost shabbily, dressed, but having about him an unmistakable air of distinction. His face is rather wan and careworn, and there is a certain bitterness in the smile that plays about his lips as he writes. By his side is a pile of type-written manuscript; a tall brass lamp, placed on the table, throws a vivid light upon him, but the rest of the room is in darkness. The door opens, and* ELLA *enters.* DICK

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starts, and quickly pulls the sheets of manuscript over the foolscap, completely hiding it. ELLA *is five or six years younger than her husband; she has eyes that are sometimes green, sometimes grey or blue, and features that, according to her mood, will be either distractingly fascinating or comparatively null. She is of medium height, and her close-fitting dress reveals a perfect figure. As she comes in she lays her hand lightly on* DICK'S *shoulder; he makes a slight movement, but does not look up.*

ELLA.

It's past eleven, Dick—I'm going to bed.

DICK.

All right; I shan't be long.

ELLA.

[*Pointing to the manuscript.*] What's this?

DICK.

Some new rubbish that Wilsons have sent me. They want six illustrations.

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ELLA.

Are you going to do them?

DICK.

Of course. That's all I'm fit for.

ELLA.

[*Gently.*] Aren't you well, Dick? You've seemed so strange the last day or two.

DICK.

I'm a bit sick, that's all. Two more big canvases coming back. It's ghastly.

ELLA.

From Liverpool?

DICK.

Yes. I haven't sold a thing this year. A nice sort of chap I am to have a wife and family!

ELLA.

It'll all come right in time.

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DICK.

Oh yes, I expect so. Most things do.

ELLA.

Why, Dick, look at the notices you have had! That picture of yours at the New——

DICK.

Nobody bought it. Nobody does buy anything of mine. The critics gush about 'em, but that's not much good, is it? Besides, I confess I don't think too highly of them myself.

ELLA.

There you're wrong——

DICK.

Ah well, we won't talk about it. Here's a new book to illustrate—I suppose I ought to be grateful. Magnificent pay—a guinea a drawing; and if the editor doesn't like the heroine's nose he sends it back to be altered.

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ELLA.

I wish you'd give up black and white, Dick.

DICK.

Must help to keep the pot boiling. It's bad enough to be living on you——

ELLA.

That's not generous——

DICK.

But it's true. Your novels sell—my pictures don't. If it weren't for your work I should have to drive a hansom, and perhaps I should do better.

ELLA.

You wait, Dick—you'll fetch big prices some day.

DICK.

Well, I shall have a good deal to sell. In the meanwhile I'll read this inspiring manuscript. "Mary Maxwell's Schooldays." Sounds thrilling, doesn't it?

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ELLA.

It's very hard luck——

DICK.

I'm resigned. And I believe some fellows only get half-a-guinea a drawing. Go to bed, Ella—I shan't be very long.

ELLA.

You're sure you're all right?

DICK.

Of course.

(*She looks rather uneasily at him—he has never lifted his eyes off the manuscript; she stands fidgeting at the door, and at last she goes. As the door closes he pushes the manuscript aside, and reads what he has written. He adds a few lines, signs his name; then seizes the loose sheets of the novel, tears them up gleefully, and throws them into the waste-paper basket. He places the sheet of foolscap prominently in the centre of the table; stretches his arms,*

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shakes his head, and yawns a huge yawn. Then he rises, goes to the bureau, takes from a drawer a box of cartridges and a revolver, which he carefully proceeds to load. He returns to his seat at the table, lays the revolver beside him, then puts his hand in his breast-pocket and gingerly brings out an envelope and a letter. He looks at them, and for a moment shows his teeth viciously; strikes a match, sets fire to the envelope, and, when it is fully ablaze, throws it on to the wood floor, and watches it burn to ashes. Then he takes the letter, strikes another match, and is on the point of setting fire to it when the door suddenly opens and ELLA *appears. The first thing she sees is the revolver. She rushes towards him shrieking; and her eyes fall on the open letter he holds in his hand.*)

ELLA.

O God!

(*Every vestige of colour has left her face, and she grips the table for support.*

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DICK *drops his match and stamps on it, shrugs his shoulders angrily, rises, and walks away.*)

ELLA.

[*Breathless.*] What does this mean?

DICK.

[*Calmly.*] You see.

ELLA.

You were going to kill yourself?

DICK.

Yes.

ELLA.

Oh! . . . Because of . . . this letter?

DICK.

I was about to burn it—no one would have known. Why didn't you go to bed?

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ELLA.

[*Falling on her knees before him.*] Dick!

DICK.

I've written a long yarn here, for the papers, and the one or two friends I have. In despair at my absolute lack of success I take a life that seems no good to any one. I express my deepest devotion to you. I put in a useful word about the misery of doing black-and-white. No one will suspect anything. And after a decent interval you can marry Taylor.

ELLA.

[*Almost maddened.*] Dick!

DICK.

I opened that letter quite by accident. I hadn't a suspicion. Then I saw it began "Darling." And I concluded it wasn't meant for me.

(ELLA *covers her face with her hands.*)

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DICK.

No one addresses me that way. My dear child, it's a great pity you didn't stop upstairs. I'm not blaming you—why should I? It's the ordinary state of things. I was at school with Taylor—I would have trusted him with my soul. Well, it's all right. Go to bed. I promise you I won't do it to-night.

ELLA.

[*Brokenly.*] You believe——

DICK.

Tut, tut, what does it matter? We've two children—they're mine, I suppose——

ELLA.

Dick!!!

DICK.

He was my best man—he's always been intimate here, ever since we were married.

ELLA.

[*Struggling to her feet.*] Will you let me——

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DICK.

Explain? What's the use? You won't tell the truth. I don't know, of course, how long all this has been going on, but all that time you have told me lies. And you want to lie to me now. To explain why he called you darling. You'll tell me he never did this before. You'll promise not to see him again——

ELLA.

Oh, never, never!

DICK.

And do you think I could go on living with you, and every time I look into your eyes feel that you're thinking of the other man? Every time I kiss you smell the other man's kiss on your lips? Oh, what's the good of talking? This letter came last night. I've thought it all out.

ELLA.

[*Mechanically.*] Why didn't you tell me?

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DICK.

What for? Make a scene? I was going to burn it when you came in. You would never have known—no one *will* know. Don't be so unhappy. I forgive you. God help me, before I was married I've done the same thing with other men's wives myself. It's a beastly world, and I'm rather in a hurry to be out of it.

ELLA.

I love you.

DICK.

Bosh! You used to, and that's something. It's not your fault—I was an ass—I thrust Taylor down your throat. I don't suppose it was his fault either. If you come to think of it, it's only human nature. He's a brilliantly clever chap—and I'm just a dreary, dreamy idiot. You read your stuff to him, and he criticised it, and of course you fell in love. My fault, not yours. You used to love me—I let the other man take my place.

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ELLA.

I swear to you that nothing has happened between him and me——

DICK.

Bah!

ELLA.

I swear it by my children——

DICK.

The subject's not savoury; and you'll make me angry. Happened! You mean you have not been his mistress? Well, perhaps not. Though when a man addresses a woman as darling, a great deal must have taken place. "Darling," he says, "I long to meet you again. Can I come on Saturday at five?" Which means, is that dolt your husband going to be out? And you would have come to me and said, "Dick, old boy, take a walk for an hour or two. Go out on your bicycle. You're looking so pale!" And I'd have gone, like a lamb. I've done it, often. Sometimes I wouldn't

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—I wanted to go on working—and it did occur to me at times to wonder why you were so insistent. But I said to myself, "She loves me so much!" Isn't it funny?

ELLA.

[*Desperately.*] You refuse to believe——

DICK.

[*Angrily.*] I'll believe any mortal thing you like. You're fond of me, of course, in a way. A woman can be fond of more than one man at a time. When you're married to Taylor you'll see that he isn't so perfect either. And now go to bed. I won't do it to-night.

ELLA.

[*Wringing her hands.*] Do it?

DICK.

What else?

ELLA.

Will you listen to me?

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DICK.

What's the use?

ELLA.

[*With a mighty effort.*] It was . . . three months ago . . . that Taylor . . . spoke to me. Since then——

DICK.

I know. You needn't tell me. Little by little, and so forth.

ELLA.

You make a terrible mistake. It has been a mere passing infatuation——

DICK.

[*Scornfully.*] Passing!

ELLA.

You won't believe——

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DICK.

I can't expect you to tell the truth.

ELLA.

. . . I have a letter in my desk—that I wrote him this evening. Will you read it?

DICK.

Why should I?

ELLA.

You must read it. At least it will show you——

(*She goes out. While she is away* DICK *burns Taylor's letter. She returns, holding a closed envelope in her hand. She drags herself along: her hands are trembling: with head bent low she offers him the envelope. He looks at it, tries to take it, but cannot.*)

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DICK.

Take it out of the envelope——

(*She tears the envelope, takes out the letter, and gives it to him. She sinks into a chair and hides her face.*)

DICK.

[*Begins to read.*] "Dear one"—ouf, take it away. . . . Take it away, take it away. . . . I'm only human after all. . . .

ELLA.

Do what you like with me, but read it.

DICK.

How can you have the . . . something . . . to give me a letter to read that begins . . . like this?

ELLA.

Read it.

(DICK *reads it; there are four pages closely written; his face expresses the utmost disgust as he goes through page after page; at last he hands back the letter.*)

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DICK.

Very pretty.

ELLA.

[*In an agony of shame.*] It proves——

DICK.

Oh yes, oh yes—that you are a "virtuous" woman. And that Taylor, for the present, accepts the situation. You love each other, but the husband's in the way. A kiss is all right, and looking into each other's eyes, and swearing fidelity—and you both feel you are loyal to poor old Dick. Well, that'll be a consolation to you, too.

ELLA.

[*With passionate earnestness.*] Will you believe me when I say that my feeling for Taylor . . . is not one thousandth part of my feeling for you?

DICK.

My dear girl, what's the use? Look here, I'll tell you something. Last month

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you went to Paris with your sister. Your letters to me were very cold. They began "Dear Dick," they ended "Yours, Ella." It struck a sort of chill into me. I didn't think much of it at the time perhaps—but still, when I remembered the letters you used to write! . . . You wrote to Taylor from Paris?

ELLA.

[*Unsteadily.*] Yes.

DICK.

How did the letters begin and end that you wrote to him? Bah! Don't let us humbug each other. Your feeling for him not a thousandth part of your feeling for me? Bah! Bah!!! Go to bed.

ELLA.

You must listen to me. You must. Remember that for the last—for the last year—you have been gloomy, self-absorbed, unhappy. I did what I could—you would

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scarcely speak to me. You always wanted to be alone. It was as though you had ceased to care for me.

DICK.

I was in despair about my work.

ELLA.

He noticed it—he saw that I felt it. He was very sympathetic——

DICK.

Naturally.

ELLA.

[*Vehemently.*] I gave you my letter to read —the letter I wrote to him. Would I have done that, do you think? I see now, for the first time. I see what a foolish sham it has been. If you had killed yourself, I would have killed myself too.

DICK.

That's absurd. There are the children. And Taylor's rich—and a very decent

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fellow. Isn't all this rather rot, after all? However you like to put it, you prefer the other man.

ELLA.

No.

DICK.

Of course you say no. But you do. Oh, it's quite true—I can't have been amusing to live with! I've been bent double, doing loathsome black-and-white; and it made me wretched, and hateful, I suppose. We've sat evening after evening, scarcely speaking a word. And he—he's brilliant, lively, witty—the very opposite of me. And . . . sympathetic. So you fell in love with him. It's natural.

ELLA.

I swear to you——

DICK.

Oh don't, don't. All this is so stupid, really. What is the good of your swearing and protesting?

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ELLA.

Then your love for me hadn't changed?

DICK.

Why should it? I've not been demonstrative, but you were the one thing on earth that was left to me. During the beastly days there was one cheering thought —that at night I should have your arms round me and see your head on the pillow next to mine. I never knew how much I loved you—till the letter came.

ELLA.

[*Passionately.*] O Dick, Dick!

DICK.

It has been my fault, mind you. You must always remember that. It isn't enough for a man to love a woman; he must make the woman go on loving him. A gloomy wretch who skulks in a corner gets pity, and that's all. But, my dear, when I read that letter I cried like a fool.

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ELLA.

O Dick!

DICK.

I said nothing—what was there to say? I made up my mind to clear. It's a paltry business, rather—but there's nothing else to be done. And now you really had better go to bed. Here—you can lock up this beastly thing. I shan't do it to-night. (*He hands her the pistol.*)

ELLA.

Then nothing I can say to you—nothing I can do——

DICK.

Nothing, nothing.

ELLA.

If I promise you that I'll never see him again, never speak to him, write to him——

DICK.

You'd still love him: you'd love him the more.

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ELLA.

[*Desperately.*] Listen. There's a thing you don't understand. What I'm going to say is shameful, but it's true, and I'll say it. He has kissed me, and I him——

DICK.

[*Writhing.*] Oh, for God's sake!

ELLA.

And probably, in course of time, we should have gone further and further, till I became . . . his mistress. Oh, I'm going to say everything! But—and I never knew it till now—it wasn't love. It was wickedness—the brute in me—that's all. Oh, let me go on! I'm giving myself away, giving away every woman! We meet a man—who says just that to us. He has a way of looking at us. We struggle; but if we're vaguely unhappy, and our life seems empty, there's something in us that wants to go out to him: the mere wickedness thrills us. Well, I've told you. He's kissed me dozens

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of times—and I've kissed him. Yes, you shall hear it all! Can I make my soul barer to you? Am I telling you lies? Well, it never was love. Never, never. I tried to believe that it was. Now I know that it always was sham. Do you understand?

DICK.

There's nothing for me to understand. You're rubbing it in rather unpleasantly, that's all. You're just a bit cynical.

ELLA.

I'm telling the truth—everything that there is to be told. And listen—he was scarcely to blame. I was his friend's wife—it was I who began. I longed to play with fire. The way he resisted, the way I maddened him, was delicious to me. My life was dull. You had got into a gloomy way. You only wanted to be alone. You let him take me about—to theatres, concerts——

DICK.

I trusted you both.

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ELLA.

A woman doesn't like to be trusted too much. Your confidence seemed just a trifle contemptuous—as though you didn't care. I thought your love had become mere habit. And there was this other man, who trembled when my hand touched his. Don't you see?

DICK.

I told you I had been to blame.

ELLA.

I had no right, of course; my virtue, and so forth. But then no woman really is virtuous. She wants to be loved. She will always contrive to be loved, if she can. When her husband kisses her mechanically, looking the other way, she'll think kindly of the man who'd walk fifty miles to button her glove. That's the whole truth. Now you know. Will you forgive me?

DICK.

I forgave you before.

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ELLA.

Why didn't you tell me you loved me? You would come to bed long after I did, you would lie down by my side. How was I to know that it made you happy to have me near you? You never told me. Everything about you had become mechanical. I didn't reason to myself, but when I found you so willing to let him take me about, so indifferent as to what might happen, I was piqued. Any woman would be. Do you understand?

DICK.

I've been an ass, of course.

ELLA.

And do you love me?

DICK.

You know that I love you.

ELLA.

[*Standing very close to him.*] I don't. Tell me.

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DICK.

What's the good, now?

ELLA.

Foolish man! Because he kissed me?

DICK.

Yes.

ELLA.

You can't forget his kisses?

DICK.

No.

ELLA.

Kiss me now and you will forget.

DICK.

You don't belong to me any more.

ELLA.

[*Passionately.*] Don't I? Not belong to you? Why, I would let him roast at a

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slow fire to cure your toothache. It was the idleness of me that cared for him, but body and soul are yearning for you. I adore you! All this has merely opened my eyes. He! Do you remember I told you at first how repulsive I thought him? So I did. The feeling wore off, through seeing him so often, and I wanted to be amused. The rest was drifting—I see him now as he is. As he is, as he is! Why, we were lovers, you and I. Have you forgotten? Oh, you fool, you fool! Do you think any man can take your place? Look at me—don't you care for me? Kill yourself, because of him? Oh, let him come as he used to, you needn't be afraid! And you loved me all the time? I tell you, I adore you. Do you hear? Don't you care? And you want to kill yourself? You're sick of life, because of him—of Taylor? You don't want your wife any more? Here, take the pistol. Shoot yourself, if you think it's all over between us and that I've been telling you lies. We'll try the next world together.

(*Dick throws open his arms and she falls on his neck.*)

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DICK.

Ella!

ELLA.

Dick, Dick, Dick, I've shown you what a beast I am, and you're going to love me the more for it. We'll begin all over again. We've just been married and we're off on our honeymoon. We know each other now. And I want you to kiss me. . . .

(*He kisses her eagerly on the lips as the curtain falls.*)

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A GAME OF CHESS

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A GAME OF CHESS

SCENE.—*The Captain's bridge of an outward-bound American liner.* DR. ROGERS *and* MISS VIVIEN MEADOWS *are playing at chess. He is a tall, sturdily-built man of thirty-five, but looks older; his thick crop of hair is heavily streaked with silver, and there are deep lines around his eyes and lips. His rugged, attractive face is clean-shaven, and his mouth is peculiar in its mixture of strength and tenderness.* MISS MEADOWS *is an exquisitely pretty American girl; a blonde, with blue eyes and fair hair.*

DR. ROGERS *has been pondering a move, but has allowed his eyes to stray from the board and wander over the sea.*

VIVIEN.

Doctor, come back! What were your thoughts?

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DR. ROGERS.

I was looking at the coastline. I fancy I'm sorry that we shall arrive so soon.

VIVIEN.

That's the first pretty speech I've had from you.

DR. ROGERS.

[*Laughing.*] Well, I'm glad I've done it at last. Though, even then, you rather annexed it, didn't you?

VIVIEN.

Do you dare to pretend that it wasn't meant for me?

DR. ROGERS.

That would not be sincere. You certainly count for much in this vague regret of mine. I am sorry that this pleasant comradeship must come to an end.

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VIVIEN.

Of course you are. And if Paris dressmakers allowed a poor woman any room for the emotions, I should be sorry too. But we shall see you in New York?

DR. ROGERS.

I don't think so.

VIVIEN.

That's an ungallant speech.

DR. ROGERS.

You see, I must make the most of this holiday of mine.

VIVIEN.

You're floundering hopelessly, doctor.

DR. ROGERS.

So many delightful things are being constantly said to you that you don't need any

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from me. But what I mean is—I can't afford to spend much money upon this trip —and an old chum at Buffalo has asked me to stay with him——

VIVIEN.

But you must be in New York for some days, surely!

DR. ROGERS.

Yes, of course, but——

VIVIEN.

Then why won't you call on us?

DR. ROGERS.

[*Bluntly.*] You're too rich.

VIVIEN.

I beg your pardon?

DR. ROGERS.

You live in a house that cost two million dollars; you have twenty-four servants——

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VIVIEN.

Who has furnished you with these exciting details?

DR. ROGERS.

Your mother.

VIVIEN.

[*With a moue.*] Um.

DR. ROGERS.

And you see, amidst such gorgeous surroundings, I should be like a . . . barn-door fowl among pheasants.

VIVIEN.

I don't care for the simile, somehow.

DR. ROGERS.

And we've had such a splendid time here —or at least I have—that I would rather recollect you, as you are now, with the sea as a background, than in a vast, magnificent,

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flunkey-ridden mansion. Do you know, it's a curious thing—up till yesterday I had no idea you were rich.

VIVIEN.

Really?

DR. ROGERS.

Not till your mother told me.

VIVIEN.

[*Regretfully.*] Yes; she came on deck yesterday for the first time.

DR. ROGERS.

I suppose I am not a very observant person, but I rather fancied you were a companion, or something of the kind.

VIVIEN.

What made you think that?

DR. ROGERS.

You told me you had crossed the Atlantic twenty-two times.

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VIVIEN.

I see. And you concluded I sweetened the life of some elderly lady—read her the papers and combed her poodle. Well, aren't you glad to know what a fortunate girl I am?

DR. ROGERS.

Yes, I suppose so. But it's a funny thing. We've talked together by the hour, these five days, and I've had no suspicion.

VIVIEN.

You wouldn't have me wear my father's millions on my sleeve, doctor. But anyway, this doesn't explain why you won't call.

DR. ROGERS.

Conceive my entrance into that exquisite Paradise, your home in Fifth Avenue! The upper footman would refuse to admit me.

VIVIEN.

That's not fair. Poppa's the wealthiest

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man in America, but he's just as simple as you are. You'd like poppa.

DR. ROGERS.

I'm sure I should. But then there's another thing, you know——

VIVIEN.

Which is?

DR. ROGERS.

Clothes. I confess to you, humbly, that I have always regarded clothes as things that should keep one warm——

VIVIEN.

[*Merrily.*] Well, that's the most awful thing I ever have heard! But then a man with your shoulders can have his clothes built by a carpenter. One looks at you, and not your coat.

DR. ROGERS.

Your mother told me you spent a thousand a year on your dresses; pounds, not dollars.

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VIVIEN.

Momma seems to have rubbed it in pretty well. But you know you're just as proud of your poverty as she is of her money. And you're both of you wrong.

DR. ROGERS.

I'm not proud of my poverty.

VIVIEN.

You are, though. You're positively stuck up. You brag about it. You were quite pleased to tell Mrs. Conolly that you had no silver in your house at home.

DR. ROGERS.

And she asked, "Did I eat with my fingers!"

VIVIEN.

Well, of course she did. That's just what she would ask. Why talk to her in a language she don't understand?

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DR. ROGERS.

I grew tired of listening to the catalogue of her wealth.

VIVIEN.

She's a freak, doctor—I'm a freak, you're a freak——

DR. ROGERS.

I?

VIVIEN.

Yes, you. You're enormously clever; you're just the man to make a big name as a doctor. And you choose to bury yourself in the East End, in a couple of rooms——

DR. ROGERS.

I beg your pardon. I have a six-roomed house, *and* a front garden.

VIVIEN.

With one old woman to wait on you. You deny yourself all the joys of this world. Why?

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DR. ROGERS.

[*Earnestly.*] We're up here on the bridge, Miss Meadows. Should we never give a thought to those down below?

VIVIEN.

A thought, yes; but not our whole life. Don't you want to be famous?

DR. ROGERS.

Not in the least.

VIVIEN.

Then you're not ambitious?

DR. ROGERS.

Oh, but I am—in a different way. I want power—I want to be a force. But fame! As if that mattered! A writing man sat in my room one day, and said his burning desire was to be a classic. Fancy! The world's millions of years old, and he would sell his soul to have his books read

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for the next century or two! Why, when our greatest poet crosses the border into the mysterious land, and meets the shades of Homer, Shakespeare, and Dante, they won't ask him how many editions he has gone into, or how many paragraphs have been written about him, but how many eyes in the world he has left will grow moist at recollection of him. That's all. Don't you agree?

VIVIEN.

Yes, I do. I've felt that way too.

DR. ROGERS.

We have many points in common. I can speak to you curiously freely and frankly. I've never met a woman before with whom I was so much in sympathy.

VIVIEN.

I'm glad of that, doctor.

DR. ROGERS.

Why *do* you live in a house that cost two million dollars? . . . Let's get on with our

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game. Your king's in an uncomfortable position. I call check.

VIVIEN.

Oh, your check's a poor thing. I just move up this pawn, and attack your rook, that square, ugly rook, which always seems to me a symbol of conventionality.

DR. ROGERS.

Why?

VIVIEN.

Well, it sweeps the board, you know, it carries everything before it. But let a little pawn, a mere common-sense little pawn, attack it, and it has at once to shift to another square. Do you know, it's a grievance of mine that the queen's the only lady in the game.

DR. ROGERS.

So she is.

VIVIEN.

It never occurred to you, of course. It's another injustice to women. What's your opinion of women, doctor?

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DR. ROGERS.

I know a good deal about them anatomically——

VIVIEN.

And otherwise?

DR. ROGERS.

Very little. My dear old mother is alive, thank God, but I have no sisters, and the only women I know at all intimately are the wives of one or two of my friends.

VIVIEN.

And don't you like them?

DR. ROGERS.

They don't like me. I'm not a ladies' man.

VIVIEN.

That's merely conceit. If I had you in hand for a week——

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DR. ROGERS.

You'd hate me the second day.

VIVIEN.

We've seen a good deal of each other on board this boat.

DR. ROGERS.

Yes, but this is my holiday. And you're so beautiful, so pleasant for the eye to rest upon——

VIVIEN.

[*Shaking her head.*] It wouldn't take me a week, doctor.

DR. ROGERS.

Your voice is so soft and soothing, the glimpses of yourself that you have vouchsafed me are so sweet and noble, that I—I . . . Women as a rule, you know, don't seem to care for me. I suppose it's my fault. I'm very old-fashioned—I like the domesticated, simple, modest species——

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VIVIEN.

You say that reproachfully. Am I deficient in all these delightful adjectives?

DR. ROGERS.

You? No. You! Why, all these days, when I thought you were poor, I said to myself . . . I said to myself. . . . Bah! That I was an ass. Let's get on with our game.

VIVIEN.

I want to know why you were an ass.

DR. ROGERS.

Because I regarded you as a person without a mother or father.

VIVIEN.

That would make me a bigger freak than I am.

DR. ROGERS.

You're not a freak at all. You're a

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sane, healthy, happy, and beautiful woman. And look here—this is our last day—I'll speak very frankly to you. I admire you profoundly. You have great scope for influence. Don't let your wealth weigh you down. Don't do like the American girls one reads of—marry some wretched, decrepit prince or duke for the sake of his title. Use your money nobly, your beauty nobly—when you marry, marry nobly.

VIVIEN.

You think that I ought to marry?

DR. ROGERS.

Every woman should marry—it's better even to be unhappily married than not married at all. But you, who have a clear brain as well as a beautiful face, will, I am sure, marry wisely.

VIVIEN.

Give me a thumbnail sketch of the bridegroom, doctor.

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DR. ROGERS.

Let him be a man, that's all, and not a mere tailor's dummy. Marry some great employer, and sweeten the lives of his workmen, bridging the gap between poverty and wealth. Or some politician, and keep him alive to the world's sorrow and suffering. Why should you want to be a princess?

VIVIEN.

Don't be so angry, doctor. I never said that I wanted to be a princess.

DR. ROGERS.

Your mother told me of some ancient Italian——

VIVIEN.

With thirty-two titles, and never a tooth. He invited me to be the ivy that should wreathe itself around his ruin. Wasn't that poetical? I could only decline in flat prose.

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DR. ROGERS.

Your mother also hinted at some roving and dissolute duke——

VIVIEN.

Circumstances beyond my control rendered me incapable of directing my mother's education when she was at an impressionable age. Her ideas and mine, as regards my future, are widely divergent. When I marry, if I marry at all, I shall try to marry wisely.

DR. ROGERS.

I am sure of it. Let me see—it's my move——

VIVIEN.

I wish you'd tell me something of your life in the East End.

DR. ROGERS.

It's very simple. Hard work, and of course poorly paid. But one's very near

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to what somebody calls "the watchfires of the tribe." It keeps the red blood in your heart active and flowing. You love those poor beggars—your work is a labour of love. Oh, there will be no Harley Street for me!

VIVIEN.

You have had offers?

DR. ROGERS.

Oh yes, I'm by way of being rather an authority on lungs, you know—there's so much consumption our way! And now and again a stray man from the West brings his wife or his daughter to see me—and they wonder at my sticking down there. But, don't you see, it's just there that I'm needed. Rich people can combat disease with good food, all refinements of luxury—the poor have nothing but the doctor's skill. There I am, day after day, fighting death and disease: trying to drill notions of cleanliness into the people's heads, attacking the landlords

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who let insanitary dwellings—oh, I tell you, that's my kingdom, and I've work enough there to last me to the end of my days!

VIVIEN.

They are all poor?

DR. ROGERS.

Poor! Street after street of absolute squalor, without a touch of brightness. If a cab passes through, it's an event that makes the youngsters sit up and stare. There's no joy in these people's lives—nothing but drudgery, sickness, and misery. The East End's the box-room of London, where all the ugly things are swept into, out of sight of the lord and lady.

VIVIEN.

And don't you mean to marry? Would a wife not help you?

DR. ROGERS.

Immensely, of course. But, fancy, what a place to take one's wife down to! Ah,

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there will be no marriage for me. . . . Now I fancy I've wearied you quite enough with my affairs. With your permission I'll push up my knight and take your bishop—we'll call it the lady abbess, out of deference to you—and I'll say check once more; also, I fancy, mate.

VIVIEN.

I guess not, doctor. You must put back that bishop, please. If you take away your knight you expose your king to check from my rook.

DR. ROGERS.

By Jove, that's true! Back goes his reverence! Seems to me that I'm in a bad way.

VIVIEN.

[*Quietly.*] Mate in three moves, doctor.

DR. ROGERS.

[*After a glance at the board.*] I'll bet you I'm not.

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VIVIEN.

What will you bet?

DR. ROGERS.

Sixpence.

VIVIEN.

Done. I'll make a hole in it, and wear it as a charm. Tell me, doctor, your health broke down?

DR. ROGERS.

Yes: overwork. I took too much out of the machine.

VIVIEN.

How long shall you be away?

DR. ROGERS.

Six weeks altogether.

VIVIEN.

You're a good deal better?

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DR. ROGERS.

Yes: thanks to you, and the sea.

VIVIEN.

You put me first?

DR. ROGERS.

My nerves were shattered, you know; and you soothed and rested them. Your voice was sweet music to me. I had suffered from sleeplessness; you cured me.

VIVIEN.

That's rather a reflection on my conversation.

DR. ROGERS.

I seemed to have met the person of whom I had dreamed. Don't be angry—New York's drawing nearer and nearer, and we shall never meet again.

VIVIEN.

I'm not at all angry.

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DR. ROGERS.

And then that horrible stream of yellow metal rushed between us, leaving me high and dry on the opposite bank, divided from you by a sea as broad as this Atlantic. But I like to tell you how much good you have done me.

VIVIEN.

I owe more to you, I fancy. What a lively imagination you have!

DR. ROGERS.

Why?

VIVIEN.

We were very good friends while you thought I was poor; and now you choose to regard me as a person who breathes a different air, and inhabits another world.

DR. ROGERS.

So you do. There's a wide abyss between the rich and the poor.

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VIVIEN.

People are wonderfully handy to-day at constructing bridges.

DR. ROGERS.

No one dreams of constructing a bridge between Dover and Calais.

VIVIEN.

Captain Webb swam right across. . . . Well, let's get on with our game. Mate in three moves, I said, did I not?

DR. ROGERS.

You had that temerity.

VIVIEN.

Number one, then: I advance a pawn.

DR. ROGERS.

The common-sense little pawn?

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VIVIEN.

Yes; and I withdraw what I said before—the pawn must be feminine—else how could she become a queen?

DR. ROGERS.

This one at least shall never ascend the throne—the rook sweeps it, or her, away.

VIVIEN.

We have such a curious set of chessmen at home—by the way, it's rather strange: you know nothing of me, or my life.

DR. ROGERS.

I know a good deal about you.

VIVIEN.

I doubt it. Has it ever occurred to you that I am terribly lonely?

DR. ROGERS.

Lonely?

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VIVIEN.

Unspeakably lonely. I am that most desolate of creatures—a marriageable heiress. A poor little golden pigeon — and the air is thick with hawks. Money has done very little for me.

DR. ROGERS.

[*Slyly.*] A thousand a year for dress——

VIVIEN.

I'm fond of dress, of course; every woman is. And I could spend ten times as much, if I chose—momma would only be pleased. But my tastes are very simple. I don't say it to make you think well of me — but a good deal of my dress-allowance goes in helping other women.

DR. ROGERS.

[*Warmly.*] I'm sure of that.

VIVIEN.

And, besides, we have a system over there —we hand over our surplus dresses to a

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central agency, which sells them, at nominal sums, to the wives and daughters of professional people. It benefits them, and us; for if we bought too luxurious clothes, they would be of no use to the others.

DR. ROGERS.

I think that's a splendid idea.

VIVIEN.

My great misfortune is that I have so very few friends. It's so difficult, you know. To most people I'm not myself at all—I'm only the millionaire's daughter. They flatter me —they say the most outrageous things. They think I'm an utter fool.

DR. ROGERS.

Wealth has its drawbacks, of course—but think what a lot of good you can do with your money.

VIVIEN.

That's not so easy; in fact, it's the most difficult thing in the world. Poppa receives

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about two hundred begging letters every day. He has three men engaged all the year round in investigating cases. Not one in fifty is genuine.

DR. ROGERS.

Poor human nature!

VIVIEN.

Oh I tell you, doctor, people won't believe it, but it's a very great misfortune.

DR. ROGERS.

Would you rather be poor?

VIVIEN.

Of course. Decently poor—I shouldn't want to be a governess, or a lady's maid. But if I had a thousand dollars a year of my own, I'd be as happy . . . as you are!

DR. ROGERS.

Ah, you've never tried it.

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VIVIEN.

I have, though. Last year I spent six weeks in Paris studying Art. No one knew who I was; I lived like the other girls, and shared a studio with one of them in the Montparnasse quarter.

DR. ROGERS.

Your father allowed it?

VIVIEN.

He was real pleased—oh, I tell you, you'd like poppa! We did our own marketing and cooking; we slept in little camp-beds behind a curtain. Then suddenly some wretched creature discovered who I was; and the *New York Herald* came out next day with flaming headlines, "Harcourt Meadows' daughter in Montparnasse—The Heiress' Strange Experiment," and so forth. I had to fly. My intention had been to spend the whole winter there. It was lovely. I never enjoyed myself so much.

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DR. ROGERS.

Well, during those six weeks, at least, you met men and women on their proper level.

VIVIEN.

Yes—for once in my life.

DR. ROGERS.

I suppose some of the people . . . were interesting?

VIVIEN.

Oh yes.

DR. ROGERS.

There were some pleasant men?

VIVIEN.

Very.

DR. ROGERS.

Well, they didn't know that you were an heiress. There was a chance for your poor weary heart.

VIVIEN.

I met one man, a professor——

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DR. ROGERS.

French?

VIVIEN.

No—an Englishman. He seemed to like me, but then that horrible notice appeared . . . and——

DR. ROGERS.

He retired?

VIVIEN.

Yes. Overwhelmed. I suppose he couldn't stand people calling him a fortune-hunter.

DR. ROGERS.

Ah . . .

VIVIEN.

It was foolish of him, wasn't it?

DR. ROGERS.

I wonder.

VIVIEN.

You needn't. I say it was very foolish. Oh, there are times when I feel inclined to ask with Shylock, "Have I not hands,

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organs, dimensions, senses, affections, passions? If you prick me, do I not bleed?" And so forth. It's a stupid world. Well, I suppose I must make my next move. No. 3.

DR. ROGERS.

Number 2.

VIVIEN.

Oh no, No. 3.

DR. ROGERS.

Excuse me——

VIVIEN.

I ought to know! I advance my queen to the king's square, and say check. Now what will you do?

DR. ROGERS.

Don't overlook my bishop.

VIVIEN.

I haven't.

DR. ROGERS.

The bishop can take your queen.

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VIVIEN.

I don't care.

DR. ROGERS.

There's some deep-laid scheme in this.

VIVIEN.

Not at all—it's very simple.

DR. ROGERS.

Why shouldn't I take the queen?

VIVIEN.

I see no reason.

DR. ROGERS.

And if I do, how am I mate?

VIVIEN.

Oh, you will be!

DR. ROGERS.

[*Scrutinising the board.*] Tell me, have you never met your professor since?

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VIVIEN.

Never.

DR. ROGERS.

Would you have married him if he had asked you?

VIVIEN.

Perhaps. I don't know.

DR. ROGERS.

And he was poor?

VIVIEN.

Very.

DR. ROGERS.

Supposing he had refused to accept any money from your father?

VIVIEN.

He would have done what I expected him to do.

DR. ROGERS.

Um. You mean what you say?

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VIVIEN.

Of course I do. But why this cross-examination?

DR. ROGERS.

Because . . . because . . . if your mother had remained below, and I had still believed you to be a companion . . . I should have asked you . . . to be my wife.

VIVIEN.

[*Quietly.*] Really?

DR. ROGERS.

Yes. And I ask it now. Will you?

VIVIEN.

[*Archly.*] Poppa's the wealthiest man in America.

DR. ROGERS.

That has nothing to do with me. Will you?

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VIVIEN.

[*Demurely.*] Hadn't we better get on with our chess?

DR. ROGERS.

No. I love you. If you can consent to live my life with me, among the poor, and be the wife of a hard-working, plodding, East End doctor—well, I believe I can make you happy.

VIVIEN.

You think that?

DR. ROGERS.

I do. You see I'm not frightened by your father's money.

VIVIEN.

But what would momma say?

DR. ROGERS.

[*Stoutly.*] I don't care a rap.

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VIVIEN.

[*With affected solicitude.*] There's not even a baronet in your family?

DR. ROGERS.

My father was a working engineer; one of my brothers is a very small farmer, the other a clerk in the City.

VIVIEN.

Dear, dear! And you wouldn't let poppa buy you a house in Park Lane?

DR. ROGERS.

Oh yes, I will—we'll sell it and build a hospital in Stepney with the money. They want one badly down there.

VIVIEN.

I may have an allowance?

DR. ROGERS.

Only what I give you.

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VIVIEN.

No lady's maid?

DR. ROGERS.

Certainly not. You'll have to live like a poor man's wife.

VIVIEN.

In the six-roomed house?

DR. ROGERS.

No: I'll make a concession. There's one with eight rooms close by, and a bit of a garden. We'll move into that.

VIVIEN.

And should I have to look after the house?

DR. ROGERS.

Naturally. I wouldn't marry the millionaire's daughter, but the Paris art-student. You would say good-bye to

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fashionable society; you would have to work very hard. With a man beside you who loved you. What do you say?

VIVIEN.

You may take the queen with the bishop.

DR. ROGERS.

[*Puzzled.*] Which means?

VIVIEN.

Didn't I say you'd be mate in three moves?

DR. ROGERS.

Ah! I begin to see!

VIVIEN.

It has taken you a very long time. Yes! I will be your wife, and live as you live. I love you: and am glad, and proud, of your love.

DR. ROGERS.

[*Bending forward eagerly.*] Vivien!

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VIVIEN.

The captain's looking.

DR. ROGERS.

Will you never regret it?

VIVIEN.

Will you?

DR. ROGERS.

I! I've never loved a woman in my life before. After all, you had the professor——

VIVIEN.

He was my second move, doctor. . . .

DR. ROGERS.

Vivien!

(*He seizes her hand and kisses it eagerly as the curtain falls.*)

CURTAIN.

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THE SALT OF LIFE

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THE SALT OF LIFE

SCENE.— MRS. ACKWORTH'S *boudoir in her husband's house in Pont Street.*

MRS. ACKWORTH (MABEL), *a pretty young woman of thirty, with a tender, sensitive mouth, is seated, holding a book that she does not read, her large brown eyes feverishly watching the clock which is ticking on the mantelpiece. Suddenly she hears a ring at the door below. She starts to her feet, glances at herself in the mirror, smooths her hair, takes up a book and pretends to read. A maid comes in and announces "Mr. Varens," who follows behind her. He is a tall, handsome man of forty, with a strong, clear-cut face; his manner is somewhat abrupt and commanding.*

MABEL.

How do you do, Mr. Varens? I am so glad I was in——

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VARENS.

I am very well, thanks——

(*They shake hands:* VARENS *sits. The maid goes—her footsteps are heard descending the stairs;* MABEL *springs up, goes eagerly to* VARENS, *and throws her arms round his neck.*)

MABEL.

[*Passionately.*] Darling, darling!

VARENS.

Hush—be careful——

MABEL.

Oh, it's all right—we shan't be disturbed. I've told Mary I'm out to every one.

VARENS.

Was that quite prudent?

MABEL.

She doesn't think anything.

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VARENS.

I had an idea that she smiled rather strangely at me——

MABEL.

Oh, that's only your fancy. She hasn't a notion. . . . Darling, darling, darling! (*She covers his face with eager kisses.*) Tell me, Paul, did you want me? Have you been thinking of me? Two weeks—two whole weeks since last I saw you! And your letters—oh the letters that you do write!

VARENS.

I am so anxious lest your husband by any chance——

MABEL.

Oh, he would never dream of opening a letter of mine—never. He's the soul of honour, poor old thing. By the way, you'll have to dine here next week.

VARENS.

Next week? I'm afraid——

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MABEL.

You must. He was saying that he hadn't seen you for quite a long time. He's very fond of you. Don't you feel very wicked?

VARENS.

Not a bit.

MABEL.

I told him you were coming to-day—I asked him couldn't he manage to be home a little earlier? He was so sorry he couldn't—this is his mail day. *I* knew! Don't you think I'm very clever?

VARENS.

[*Somewhat drily.*] Very.

MABEL.

He sends you his kind regards. I'll give them to you. (*She hugs him.*) There!

VARENS.

And the children?

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MABEL.

Oh, they're all right. Dolly's in bed with a cold—I sent Tom to his grandmother's. Paul, Paul, I do love you so! Tell me that you love me!

VARENS.

Don't you know that I love you?

MABEL.

No. I want you to tell me, to tell me again and again. I should never tire—never. O Paul, have you been thinking of me? I have wanted you so much!

VARENS.

We have to be careful——

MABEL.

Yes, of course. Oh yes, I realise that. But two weeks—you don't know what it means to me. Don't let it be so long again, will you?

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VARENS.

[*Tugging his moustache.*] H'm . . .

MABEL.

[*Sitting on the arm of his chair, her cheek pressed to his.*] Oh, love! What a wonderful thing it is! I'm fond of dear old Jack, of course—but I never knew what love meant. You marry a man who's twenty years older than you. To me it's quite marvellous. To think that all these years I should have lived and not known! Paul, tell me——

VARENS.

What?

MABEL.

[*Holding up her finger.*] Here, kiss this tiny gold ring you gave me. (*He obeys.*) Nobody sees it, nobody knows of it, nobody knows of us. Oh, how often I kiss that ring! It's foolish, isn't it? But then I suppose love is foolish—don't you think?

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VARENS.

I fancy the poets say so.

MABEL.

[*Shaking her head at him.*] Oh—you!—I suppose you've loved lots of women. . . . I hate to think of it. . . . But you never cared for any as you do for me—did you?

VARENS.

Never.

MABEL.

How coldly you say it! Doesn't it make you happy to know that I'm wholly, totally yours? (*She kisses him again.*) Darling! Oh, whatever you told me to do, I would do, blindly. You know that? I would. Oh, isn't it awful to think that you've been here ten minutes already! I scarcely dared look at any one to-day—I felt that my eyes were dancing.

VARENS.

Then you don't regret loving me?

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MABEL.

[*With a laugh.*] Regret! Will that ever come, I wonder? I don't know. I'm too happy to think. This love of mine has swept me off my feet. I'm almost cruelly happy—there are times when it hurts. But I live—I never have lived before. Why, they all used to say I was cold. . . . As a girl, I didn't even flirt. I married Jack because he was such a good fellow—that was all—and he seemed so fond of me. And all these years not a heartbeat. Then you came—and suddenly—there I was—caged! And to think that I've scarcely known you six months! I hated you at first.

VARENS.

[*Drumming his fingers against the chair.*] So you've told me——

MABEL.

[*Archly.*] Yes: and I'll tell you again, and again, and again, and as often as I choose! I hated you because you had

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such a conquering air . . . and I thought that your smile was cruel . . . and I didn't like the way you looked at me. . . . Or was it that you didn't look at me enough? I don't know. And then there was that horrid Mrs. Jessopp——

VARENS.

Don't call her horrid. She's a very good friend of mine.

MABEL.

You should hear the way she speaks of *you!* They said you loved her.

VARENS.

Pooh! We were friends.

MABEL.

[*Twisting his face round and looking him straight in the eye.*] Swear that you never were more than friends?

VARENS.

[*Meeting her glance unflinchingly.*] I swear.

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MABEL.

She says awful things about you. Did you treat her badly, Paul?

VARENS.

[*Impatiently.*] How on earth could I have treated her badly?

MABEL.

Then why does she hate you so?

VARENS.

Why do women hate men? I tore her dress at a dance, perhaps; or admired her black hair after she had dyed it brown.

MABEL.

A woman would hate a woman for that—not a man. Oh, I'm certain that you and she——

VARENS.

[*Vexed.*] Mabel! I've told you——

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MABEL.

[*Humbly.*] Don't be angry, dearest. . . . Of course I'm jealous of every woman you even have looked at. . . . O Paul, there must have been so many women in your life!

VARENS.

Not more than in any one else's. I'm not a Don Juan.

MABEL.

It's those eyes of yours, those wicked eyes. Yes — they're wicked, Paul — you know that? Wicked. They went through and through me. I felt them on me—I tried to look past them, to fight them. They held me and mastered me. Oh, they're wicked! And then that day when you kissed me! I nearly fainted. O Paul, how could you?

VARENS.

Were you so sorry?

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MABEL.

I had longed for it, dreaded it—and when it came I loved it. . . . And Jack in the next room, writing a letter!

VARENS.

It *was* a bit risky——

MABEL.

If I had screamed?

VARENS.

Women don't.

MABEL.

I don't know. . . . I would have, I think . . . only . . . only . . . I liked it so much! A whole wave of gladness rolled through me. . . . And then Jack came in . . . and we sat at opposite sides of the table, and talked of indifferent things. . . . And I said "Good-bye, Mr. Varens." And I knew my whole life was changed.

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VARENS.

Why? These things don't change people's lives.

MABEL.

O Paul, don't talk like that. Don't hurt me to-day—I'm so happy. I've a dreadful sort of suspicion at times that my love doesn't mean much to you.

VARENS.

[*Rising, and betraying a little fretfulness.*] My dear Mabel——

MABEL.

Oh, I'm not going to be tiresome. I'm foolish, I know. I love you too much, and show it too much. "There should always be one fold of a woman's gown," you said once, "that a man cannot succeed in embracing."

VARENS.

[*With his back turned, at the other side of the room.*] There's some truth in that, too.

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MABEL.

Well, I'm not a wise woman. If I had been I shouldn't have loved you so much—or not at all, perhaps, who knows? But one can't change one's nature. And my love is worth something, Paul, isn't it, even if I show it more than I should?

(*She rises and goes to him, stands on tiptoe, and puts her arms round his neck, and her lips close to his. He makes a slight backward movement.*)

MABEL.

What is it, Paul? You're looking odd.

VARENS.

Sit down. I've something to tell you.

MABEL.

Unpleasant?

VARENS.

Yes. (*He leads her to a chair: she sits: he stands before her.*) I've rather bad news.

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MABEL.

O Paul, I'm so sorry! (*She takes his hand.*) Has anything happened?

VARENS.

Yes.

MABEL.

Oh what? you must tell me——

VARENS.

I have to go away.

MABEL.

[*Dazed.*] Go away—you?

VARENS.

Yes.

MABEL.

For how long?

VARENS.

Six months—a year——

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MABEL.

Oh!

(*She has turned white: she holds her hand to her side and gasps for breath.* VARENS *looks quietly at her.*)

VARENS.

I've been asked by the editor of the *Courier* to go to the Philippines——

MABEL.

[*Mechanically.*] The . . . Philippines?

VARENS.

Yes.

MABEL.

And when . . . do you start?

VARENS.

[*Abruptly.*] To-morrow.

MABEL.

To-morrow?

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VARENS.

Yes.

(*There is silence: she sits motionless and rigid.* VARENS *heaves a sigh of relief. Suddenly* MABEL *bursts into almost hysterical laughter.*)

MABEL.

Oh, what a fool I am! This is a joke, of course—you don't mean to go. It's a cruel joke too. Why, you are rich. You told me what a heap of money you made by your book. Is it likely that you would leave me?

VARENS.

I can't help it, Mabel—I must. I'm frightfully cut up about it—but I must——

MABEL.

Why?

VARENS.

When a man has been a war correspondent for as many years as I have, he gets the fever in his veins. I've been here

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twelve months, doing nothing. It makes me sour and sulky.

MABEL.

[*Trembling.*] And . . . our love?

VARENS.

Oh, six months will go very quickly——

MABEL.

Quickly! . . . Paul, Paul, have you thought this out? Do you know what you are doing? That I shall go mad—kill myself, perhaps?

VARENS.

Don't be so absurd. If you were my wife I should have to leave you.

MABEL.

It would be different then. As it is, it's impossible—quite. You can't go—you mustn't. Why, you might get killed out there!

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VARENS.

I take my chance as I did before. But there's not much danger this time. I'll be back in six months—before, perhaps—and then——

MABEL.

[*Suspiciously.*] Is it true? Are you really going? Or is this merely a trick?

VARENS.

[*Shrugging his shoulders.*] Here is the editor's letter: I only got the offer to-day.

(*He hands it to her, she glances at it, lets it fall to the floor, then springs wildly to her feet.*)

MABEL.

Paul, Paul, you mustn't! No, no, you can't, you can't! It would be quite impossible, quite! I don't know what I should do. I couldn't go on. You must see that—you must!

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VARENS.

My dear girl, you didn't expect me to stop in London for ever——

MABEL.

I see what it is! You're tired of me!

VARENS.

Rubbish. I'm like a soldier—when I'm called, I have to go.

MABEL.

Tired of me—yes—that's what it is! O God!

(*She bursts into passionate tears.*)

VARENS.

[*Alarmed.*] For Heaven's sake, don't do that! Mabel! Suppose some one came in——

MABEL.

[*Sobbing.*] I don't care—I don't care!

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VARENS.

Come, come, dry your eyes . . . I thought there was stronger stuff in you . . . don't you think that I'm suffering too? Do you think *I* want to go?

(*He leads her to a chair—she sits, folds her hands, and stares blankly before her.*)

Here, take my handkerchief: dry your eyes. (*She obeys.*) Just think what might have happened!

MABEL.

Is there anything else could happen?

VARENS.

If your husband suspected——

MABEL.

My husband! Do you think I can take up my life as it was? Do you think I can let you go? I can't. It's impossible. Paul, Paul, there's another woman!

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VARENS.

You'll make me angry.

MABEL.

There's another woman — I feel it! You're tired of me!

VARENS.

This really is childish. I love you: I've told you that a good many thousands of times: but this work of mine is my work, and I've got to do it.

MABEL.

Take me with you then!

VARENS.

[*Unable to repress a smile.*] To the Philippines?

MABEL.

I don't care where it is—I can't stop here!

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VARENS.

Of course I knew that you'd feel it—don't you think I do?—but I had no idea that you'd make such a scene. Good Heavens, what is it, after all? I'll be back in six months.

MABEL.

Never, never! You'll never come back!

VARENS.

Do you think I mean to stay there for the rest of my life?

MABEL.

Oh, I know! I see it all! You go away—leave me—and I'm just one more recollection to you—one more woman you've ruined!

VARENS.

[*Quietly.*] You're giving me a nice character.

MABEL.

[*Wailing.*] Your sister said to me one day

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—oh, it comes back to me now!—that you'd break the heart of any woman who loved you.

VARENS.

My sister is a romantic and sentimental person. In the first place, hearts don't break——

MABEL.

Not yours! Oh no, no, I'm sure of that! Paul, Paul, how can you be so cruel to me?

VARENS.

I don't know what you want me to do. I love you, of course: I love you as much as I'm capable of loving. But I can't give up my profession. I can't go on idling here.

MABEL.

[*Wringing her hands.*] Oh, what have you done to me!

VARENS.

Nothing. We've been very happy—we shall be again. When I come back——

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MABEL.

You won't! Not to me!

VARENS.

I swear to you, on my honour——

MABEL.

[*Bitterly.*] Your honour!

VARENS.

It's as good as most people's——

MABEL.

You, my husband's friend!

VARENS.

And a good friend too. I'm very fond of Jack.

MABEL.

[*Burying her face in her hands.*] Horrible, horrible!

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VARENS.

What is horrible? Nothing has happened.

MABEL.

You leave me here, with my sin upon me——

VARENS.

Rubbish. Sin—why? Your life was cold and dreary—I brought some colour into it. Where is the sin?

MABEL.

Yes, yes—that was always the way you talked!

VARENS.

And isn't it true? Do you imagine we were only intended to be miserable here? Every human creature has the right to love, and be loved, if he can. An episode like ours is the salt of life——

MABEL.

To you!

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VARENS.

And to you too. Has it made you care less for your husband? Not a bit—you like him the better—you forgive him for boring you. You and I haven't invented human nature, and it's stronger than we are.

MABEL.

Till I met you I was at peace—happy. I was doing my duty——

VARENS.

Duty! That's only a phrase, to be written in nice round-hand in our copy-books. You're doing your duty now. You're a good wife—a good mother. Jack doesn't know—he never will know. What harm have you done?

MABEL.

Yes, yes, that's your creed!

VARENS.

I'm no worse than my neighbours,

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because I don't snivel. I find the world a pleasant place—it was probably meant to be pleasant——

MABEL.

The moment you're on the steamer you'll look out for some other woman!

VARENS.

I'm a bad sailor, unfortunately.

MABEL.

Make fun of it—yes. What does it mean to you?

VARENS.

It means a very great deal. I'm treating it lightly, because you're so foolish. I'll be gone six months at most. We'll write to each other—and I don't suppose you'll love me the less when I come back——

MABEL.

[*Bitterly.*] When you come back!

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VARENS.

I'm not good at love-speeches, but you know, or ought to know, how I feel towards you. You've been very cruel to me this afternoon——

MABEL.

I!

VARENS.

Yes, you. You put me down as a mere heartless brute. I'm not. I'm as fond of you as I can be. But I know myself. I can't go on idling here, doing nothing. I can't stand a collar, Mabel. I must be free.

MABEL.

Aren't you free?

VARENS.

You want to chain me — that isn't possible. And if you love me, prove it by letting me go, calmly and quietly, and looking forward to my return.

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MABEL.

Must you stop away so long?

VARENS.

I'll come sooner if I can — it's just possible. I'll write by every mail. You'll send your letters care of the paper.

MABEL.

The *Courier?*

VARENS.

Yes, in Fleet Street. You see, you're sensible now. A few months, that's all! . . . You'll think kindly of me, whatever my sister says?

MABEL.

I'll try.

VARENS.

You see, there seemed no reason to me why I shouldn't love Mabel, and I can't say I've ever regretted it. You, it appears——

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MABEL.

O Paul, Paul!

VARENS.

I won't tease you. Well, I must be off——

MABEL.

Already?

VARENS.

I have to pack, and write innumerable letters. Remember me to your husband—

MABEL.

[*With a shiver.*] My husband!

VARENS.

And I'll meet you here again—in this room—very soon. Good-bye.

(*He bends over and kisses her; she sits rigid in her chair. He kisses her again; takes up his hat and cane, and turns to go; she springs to her feet, ana flings her arms wildly round his neck.*)

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MABEL.

No! I can't! It's impossible! I can't!

VARENS.

[*Trying to free himself.*] Mabel!

MABEL.

[*Madly.*] It's no good, it's no good. I shall be sitting there, when you're gone: and *he* will come home, and talk to me. I can't—I tell you I can't!

VARENS.

Mabel, for God's sake!

MABEL.

[*Struggling.*] I don't care, I don't care! I can't live without you—I can't, I can't live! I tell you I shall go mad! Paul,

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take me with you—I can't bear it. Paul! Paul!

(*Sobbing hysterically, her arms closely entwined around his neck, she clings to him, and he is unable to free himself. He is at his wits' end, doing what he can to soothe and appease her. Suddenly heavy footsteps are heard ascending the stairs.*)

VARENS.

D'you hear? That's your husband! Quick! I'll go down—talk to him—stop him. Quick!

(*Her arms have involuntarily loosened themselves, he breaks away from her, seizes his hat and cane, and rushes from the room.* MABEL *stands for a moment as though dazed—then she totters to the glass, still sobbing brokenly—passes her handkerchief over her eyes and tries to restrain herself. The sound of voices is heard from below—* VARENS *talking to her husband on the stairs.* MABEL *listens—groans and*

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looks at her face in the glass. She takes a small powder-puff from her châtelaine and touches her face with it. From below comes the sound of VARENS' *loud laughter; then the footsteps of one man descending and the other coming up the stairs.* MABEL *puts the powder-puff away, takes a book, sits and holds the book before her face.*)

CURTAIN.

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MR. STEINMANN'S CORNER

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MR. STEINMANN'S CORNER

SCENE.—*A sumptuously furnished drawing-room in* MRS. HARDWICKE'S *house in Pont Street. The appointments are of the conventional kind, destitute of the slightest evidence of individual taste; and there is a curious absence of the feminine touches wherewith a woman will beautify a room. There are tall plants, but no flowers; heavily framed canvases, of the severely orthodox order, hang on the walls; chairs, tables, sofas, are all drearily magnificent. In a corner a grand piano displays its vastness, but no music-sheets desecrate its stately front. The atmosphere of the room is rigid, precise, and coldly respectable; and from beneath their untinted shades the electric globes throw an austere, searching white light upon the immaculateness around.*

MRS. HARDWICKE *is seated at a small table, diligently embroidering a grey silk cloth. She is a well-preserved woman of*

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forty, with regular, set features, dark brown hair, and very light blue eyes. She wears a simple, high-necked evening dress, on which a gold chain, that hangs round her neck, is the only ornament; and all about her proclaims the woman who has frankly accepted middle age, and has long since discarded any coquettish desire to please. Her movements, even when lifting the scissors from the table, raising or lowering her needle, are deliberate and precise. She pauses in her work, and glances at the clock; then sews on, calmly and imperturbably. After a time she rises, presses an electric bell, and returns to her seat. JOSEPH, *the butler, an old, pleasant-looking man, enters.*

MRS. HARDWICKE.

It is nine o'clock, Joseph: Mr. Hardwicke will have dined. You can clear away downstairs.

JOSEPH.

Yes, madam. (*He turns to go, then pauses, and listens.*) I think I hear his latchkey, m'm.

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MRS. HARDWICKE.

Ah. . . . Then perhaps you had better wait.

(*She resumes her sewing: after a moment* PERCY HARDWICKE *comes in. He is at least five years younger than his wife, and must have been exceedingly handsome in his youth. At present his hair has receded, and grown grey at the temples; there are heavy lines around his mouth and on his forehead; and his eyes have the tired look of a man who finds little in this world that he loves to gaze upon. He enters hurriedly, evidently under stress of great excitement, but stops abruptly on seeing* JOSEPH. *His wife does not rise, or lay down her needle, but she glances quietly at him.*)

MRS. HARDWICKE.

Have you dined, Percy? I told Joseph to keep——

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PERCY.

Yes, yes, thanks. All right, Joseph.

JOSEPH.

I can get you some dinner in five minutes, sir——

PERCY.

No, no, thanks—no—I have dined——

(JOSEPH *stays a moment deprecatingly—* PERCY *waves him impatiently aside, and he goes.* MRS. HARDWICKE *sews steadily.* PERCY *strips off his gloves, and rolls them into a ball; he passes his hand over his forehead, and for a moment seems to be catching his breath, and trying to master himself. His face is very haggard, and there is a twitching of the lower lip that he apparently cannot control. He takes a step towards his wife; pauses; looks around the room; then suddenly stamps his foot.*)

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PERCY.

For God's sake put away that sewing!

MRS. HARDWICKE.

[*In genuine amazement.*] Percy!

PERCY.

I'm ruined; I can't meet my difference to-morrow; I shall be hammered.

MRS. HARDWICKE.

What!!!

(*The embroidery slips from her hand and falls on to the floor; her large pale eyes open wide, and for the briefest instant become full of expression. She masters herself quickly, however, and her voice, when she speaks, betrays neither emotion nor sympathy.*)

MRS. HARDWICKE.

How has this happened?

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PERCY.

[*With one hand pressed to his brow.*] I was a bear of two thousand Cordovas——

MRS. HARDWICKE.

Steinmann's mine!

PERCY.

Yes. A swindle of course, like all his things. But he's cornered me, and a lot of others. They've fixed to-morrow for special settlement. The buying-in price is twenty-five.

MRS. HARDWICKE.

Twenty-five!!!

PERCY.

Yes.

MRS. HARDWICKE.

And you sold at——?

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PERCY.

[*With a groan.*] One and a half . . .

MRS. HARDWICKE.

[*Scornfully.*] One and a half! So you have to pay nearly fifty thousand pounds!

PERCY.

[*Doggedly.*] And I'm thirty thousand short. Things haven't gone well with me lately——

(*There is silence;* MRS. HARDWICKE *picks up her embroidery; but lets her hands lie idle in her lap. Her face is impassive: she does not look at her husband. He is evidently relieved at having told his story, and lets himself drop into a chair.*)

PERCY.

A horrible swindle, of course — that goes without saying! Ricketts, Blandly, Travers, Helbin—we're all caught. Steinmann's got us!

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MRS. HARDWICKE.

[*Quietly.*] Is there no chance of the Committee——

PERCY.

No—they won't interfere. I must buy in at twenty-five—or——

(*He leaves his sentence unfinished, and looks eagerly at his wife.*)

MRS. HARDWICKE.

[*Harshly.*] Steinmann! You might have known!

PERCY.

It's easy to say that now. We thought——

MRS. HARDWICKE.

If you had done me the honour to consult me——

PERCY.

I wish to God I had!

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MRS. HARDWICKE.

My father always talked these matters over. But you——

PERCY.

[*Fretfully.*] Oh, it's no use bringing that up now. And I've been an ass, of course. But the thing was so barefaced! Every paper down on the mine—not a penny of public money in it! Steinmann and his gang hold every share.

MRS. HARDWICKE.

[*With a touch of sarcasm.*] Naturally.

PERCY.

We thought he was on his last legs. He went round borrowing, mortgaging—he has plotted this thing for the last six months——

MRS. HARDWICKE.

Oh yes—he's clever!

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PERCY.

Clever? Curse him!

(*There is silence again;* MRS. HARDWICKE *resumes her sewing.* PERCY *mops his handkerchief over his forehead, rises, steadies himself against the chair, and walks up to his wife. He tries to speak firmly, but his voice is very unsteady.*)

PERCY.

Will you see me through this, Maria?

MRS. HARDWICKE.

[*With unfeigned astonishment.*] I! (*For an instant she pauses in her work, and looks at* PERCY; *then gives a gentle shrug, and goes on sewing.*)

PERCY.

The firm is Marriott and Hardwicke, you know—your father's name is in it——

MRS. HARDWICKE.

[*Coldly.*] My father is dead.

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PERCY.

There is my name too.

MRS. HARDWICKE.

You should have thought of that before. It was a monstrous risk to run.

PERCY.

[*Humbly.*] You have a hundred and fifty thousand pounds. If you will lend me thirty——

MRS. HARDWICKE.

[*With a half smile.*] Lend!

PERCY.

[*Eating the leek.*] Or give—it means the same thing, I suppose—I promise you that I will be . . . eternally grateful. . . . (MRS. HARDWICKE *sews on, and gives no sign.*) There is nothing in the world that you shall ever ask of me . . . nothing, nothing. . . . You will do this for me, Maria. . . . It means life or death to me, almost. If they hammer me——

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MRS. HARDWICKE.

[*Her eyes fixed on her work.*] Steinmann is known as a rogue; you will have every one's sympathy.

PERCY.

[*Trying to keep calm.*] You don't seem to understand. There is the dishonour——

MRS. HARDWICKE.

My dear Percy, this is mere sentiment. Numbers of men have been hammered; it all depends on what the cause has been. You will go through it like the others—I will help you to pay ten shillings in the pound.

PERCY.

[*Violently.*] Ten shillings in the pound!

MRS. HARDWICKE.

And afterwards give you enough to begin again, although really . . . but perhaps you will be wiser in future.

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PERCY.

[*With increasing agitation.*] Look here, you mean well, I know. And of course there's some truth in what you say. But perhaps the one thing that's good in me is the pride I have in my name. It has never been disgraced before. And you see, every one knows that your father left you all his money —besides land and houses. . . . Don't you understand? No one will believe that you have . . . refused to help me. They will say that I . . . sheltered myself . . . behind you.

MRS. HARDWICKE.

It doesn't matter what people say. One has to act wisely.

PERCY.

There is the child upstairs, too. You will be putting a stigma upon him——

MRS. HARDWICKE.

[*Unable to repress a smile.*] Stigma, stigma! My dear Percy! you forget that I am a

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daughter of the Stock Exchange. Stigma! Why, I have known dozens of men——

PERCY.

Who were hammered, and didn't mind—dishonoured, and didn't care. Well, I'm not one of them. I do care. And you are my wife. The money is yours, of course, but I am your husband—I have a certain claim. If you hadn't the money, the thing would be different. But, as it is, it's impossible. You must see that. People would point their finger at me. It's disgrace, sheer disgrace. There's only one way of looking at it.

MRS. HARDWICKE.

[*Imperturbably.*] I am sorry that I cannot agree with you.

PERCY.

Then for once you must accept my guidance.

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MRS. HARDWICKE.

[*Looking up, with an indulgent smile.*] My dear Percy!

PERCY.

[*Doggedly.*] My guidance. Women don't understand these things. You evidently don't realise that if you refuse to lend me this money——

MRS. HARDWICKE.

Make Steinmann a present of thirty thousand pounds!

PERCY.

It doesn't matter whom it goes to. It saves me, and your child, from dishonour.

MRS. HARDWICKE.

[*Drily.*] I have already told you that I do not consider it dishonour.

PERCY.

Of that I am the better judge. As your husband——

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MRS. HARDWICKE.

My dear friend, you have said that before. I should have thought that you knew me well enough to be aware that when I say "no," I mean "no."

(*She half turns from him, as though to indicate that the discussion is ended. There is silence: she sews, and sews; her needle rises and falls methodically; her breath comes regularly and calmly.* PERCY *stands, watching her. Suddenly a strange rush of colour comes into his face; the veins in his forehead swell; he goes close to her and grips her chair.*)

PERCY.

[*Passionately.*] If you refuse me this money, you are no longer my wife.

MRS. HARDWICKE.

[*Calmly.*] Don't be melodramatic, Percy.

PERCY.

[*Raising his hand.*] I swear to God——

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MRS. HARDWICKE.

Don't. And there is no need for the servants to hear. All this is childish. Our marriage was a marriage of reason. We are not sentimental lovers; we are reasonable people—partners. You are too excited to-night to be able to consider this matter calmly. I will go to my room.

PERCY.

[*Wildly.*] Maria——

MRS. HARDWICKE.

Should you be gone to-morrow before I come down, you will let me know in the course of the morning how much you need to make up the ten shillings in the pound, and I will send you a cheque. And, as I told you, afterwards, when the . . . formality . . . has been gone through, I will give you enough to start again. Good-night.

PERCY.

Stop. Think well of what you are doing. You refuse?

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MRS. HARDWICKE.

I refuse. Good-night.

(*She has gathered up her belongings, and goes, calmly, without a backward glance. The door opens, and shuts: she is gone.* PERCY *sinks into a chair, and for a minute or two stares blankly before him. He holds up his hand and looks at it; crosses and uncrosses his legs; yawns vaguely once or twice, then remembers, with a violent start.* JOSEPH *comes in.*)

JOSEPH.

There is a lady to see you, sir.

PERCY.

What?

JOSEPH.

Yes, sir—a lady.

PERCY.

To see me—at this hour?

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JOSEPH.

Yes, sir. She must see you, she says.

PERCY.

Me—not Mrs. Hardwicke?

JOSEPH.

You, sir: and alone, she said.

PERCY.

This is very strange. Didn't she give a name?

JOSEPH.

No, sir. She has a gentleman with her. I've shown them into the library, sir.

PERCY.

There's a gentleman, eh? You didn't mention him. All right, I'll go down. (*He tries to rise, but faintness comes over him,*

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and he has to hold on to the chair.) Better ask them to come up here, Joseph.

(JOSEPH *goes.* PERCY *sits, and rests listlessly in his chair, motionless, as though his mind were a blank. The door opens;* JOSEPH *enters, followed by a lady who is heavily veiled.* PERCY *does not move, or seem to notice. The lady remains standing in the middle of the room;* JOSEPH *goes to his master and touches him on the shoulder.*)

JOSEPH.

The lady, sir.

PERCY.

[*With a start.*] Oh . . . (*He rises, with difficulty, and takes a step forward.*) I beg your pardon. . . .

(JOSEPH *goes.* *As the door closes, the lady lifts her veil.*)

PERCY.

Nora!!!

(*He staggers back, in utter bewilderment. The woman he looks upon is tall,*

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slender and graceful: a girl of twenty-four. Heavy masses of waving black hair enclose a face that is very pale, and bears signs of illness and suffering. Her dark grey eyes are strangely bright and arresting. At present, as she unflinchingly meets PERCY'S *gaze, a faint smile softens the haughty curves of her arched upper lip.*)

PERCY.

Nora!

NORA.

[*Quietly.*] Yes; it is I.

PERCY.

You here—in my house—to-night!

NORA.

You are in trouble.

(*For an instant they stand, looking at each other:* PERCY *is feverishly agitated,* NORA *deeply tranquil.*)

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NORA.

Mr. Steinmann dined with us last night —he has told me——

PERCY.

Steinmann!!

NORA.

Yes. He has ruined you? Caught you in a trap? (PERCY *nods.*) Well, I have set you free. Look.

(*She takes from her bosom a paper, which she places in his hand.* PERCY *glances at it, then stares blankly at her.*)

PERCY.

What does this mean?

NORA.

He explained it to me, but you know how stupid I am. It seems that you sold two thousand shares that you haven't got; and now they are very dear, and you have to buy them back. Is that right?

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PERCY.

Yes. But how——

NORA.

Well, that paper, he says, sells the shares back to you at the price you sold them at. It's very simple, when you understand it.

PERCY.

[*Pressing his hand to his forehead.*] Why did Steinmann give you this paper?

NORA.

I made it a condition.

PERCY.

A condition?

NORA.

Yes. He wants me to marry him.

PERCY.

What!!! Marry Steinmann! You!

(*He staggers back, and lets himself fall into a chair.* NORA *remains standing.*)

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NORA.

And I have said that I would.

PERCY.

I don't understand. How came you to know Steinmann?

NORA.

When my father died I went to live with my brother. Six months ago he brought Mr. Steinmann home, and since then he has come very often. He asked me to marry him. I refused. My brother was angry. He told Mr. Steinmann — about you.

PERCY.

That I had——

NORA.

Thrown me over, yes, to marry the daughter of a rich stockbroker. And to-night Mr. Steinmann came to me very triumphantly, and told me what he had done. He thought I hated you.

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PERCY.

And you don't?

NORA.

Apparently not. I told him I would marry him, if he gave me that paper.

PERCY.

[*Aghast.*] Marry him—to save me!

NORA.

That's my revenge.

PERCY.

My God, if you wanted revenge, you've had it already! Marry Steinmann—you! Doesn't he know my wife is rich?

NORA.

He was sure that she wouldn't help you. That is so, I suppose? He was so certain!

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PERCY.

And he consented to—give you this paper?

NORA.

Oh yes. After a time. He seems very fond of me.

PERCY.

That frog! . . . And your brother is willing?

NORA.

Delighted.

PERCY.

Faugh! . . . It is he who is waiting downstairs?

NORA.

Yes. I made that a condition, too. I wished to come and tell you myself. It was mean, perhaps, but you see I wanted my revenge.

PERCY.

You must find some other way, Nora.

(*He rises, tears the paper into little pieces, and lets them flutter on to the floor.*)

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NORA.

[*Laughing quietly.*] That doesn't matter. He won't take your money.

PERCY.

[*Violently.*] Are you mad? Do you know what you're doing? Do you know what all this means?

NORA.

Oh yes: I'm not a child.

PERCY.

Look here—*my* marriage has not been happy. Be warned by that. I tell you, where there's no love, it's just Hell——

(*Nora laughs again.*)

PERCY.

[*Fretfully.*] All this is beyond me. I'm not very fit to-night—my head isn't clear.

NORA.

Is it clear enough to remember what happened between us four years ago?

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PERCY.

I behaved like a blackguard, of course. I threw you over. I went to you, and asked you to release me.

NORA.

And we have never met since then, have we? These four years, it would seem, have not been too pleasant for either of us. I waited for my revenge: and now it has come, I take it.

PERCY.

All this is absurd. You've no conception of what it means. There's more in marriage than going to church, and sitting at the same table.

NORA.

Oh, I know!

PERCY.

You talk like a child.

NORA.

I'm twenty-four.

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PERCY.

You think you're acting beautifully; that it's noble self-sacrifice, and so forth. It's nothing of the kind. It's hideous and beastly, that's what it is — as bad as my own marriage, and worse.

NORA.

You married to get money, not to serve me.

PERCY.

Well, that was more sensible — yes, it was. Why should you serve me? What am I to you?

NORA.

The man I love.

(PERCY *drops into a chair and hangs his head.*)

NORA.

It's strange, isn't it? But that's how it is. And so, to do you this service, notwithstanding yourself and in spite of yourself, gives me pleasure.

(*He tries to speak, she holds up her hand.*)

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NORA.

You need say nothing. This is your punishment. I command you to accept this favour from me, the woman you flung aside that you might marry the stockbroker's daughter. I took it very quietly, did I not? I made no scene. We had been engaged for six months. Then you came, and snapped me in two. This is the first day I have lived, since then.

PERCY.

I know I behaved like a cad.

NORA.

And it's sweet to me to feel that the money *she* refused—she, who could spare it so well—*I* bring you, *I*, at the cost of myself. And you dare not refuse.

PERCY.

[*Feebly.*] Dare not?

NORA.

No.

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PERCY.

And why?

NORA.

Because of the wrong you have done me. I have waited a very long time: it is my turn now. Ah, you are too proud to accept this service from me! Where was your pride when you broke my heart? You will do as I tell you, Percy.

PERCY.

[*Going towards her.*] Listen, Nora, there are other ways. As I look at you I realise —oh, bitterly enough!—what a fool I have been. I will go away with you, if you like.

NORA.

Go away?

PERCY.

Yes; to America—anywhere. My wife would divorce me. We could get married.

NORA.

No.

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PERCY.

Why? If you love me——

NORA.

Ah, had you come to me any time these four years, I would have gone with you! But not now. Your love was a puny thing, Percy—you had forgotten.

PERCY.

No.

NORA.

What did it mean to you, after all? A meek little girl in a corner, who raised her lips to be kissed. A timid little person, who wasn't clever, who had only her pretty face! Well, there it is. Things have changed now, you see. I speak, and you obey.

PERCY.

Don't you see that I can't! It's impossible!

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NORA.

You must. Steinmann is ugly: he blots out the sunshine. He eats with his knife: he talks a strange jargon of German and English. But I shall marry him. Besides, he adores me. I'm not sure that he will be happy.

PERCY.

[*Desperately.*] All this is horrible—monstrous——

NORA.

Why? I must marry some one—my brother is tired of having to keep me. And I have no talents. I shall be Mrs. Steinmann: so you may tell the stock-broker's daughter you don't need her money.

PERCY.

Nora, Nora, I beg of you——

NORA.

My dear Percy, what is the use? And

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remember, no one will know. Steinmann won't speak: he won't want people to learn how much he has paid for his wife. It will remain a secret between us three. I talked it all over with him. You are quite helpless. He wrote a letter to-night to his brokers, to say that your contract was cancelled. I posted that letter myself.

PERCY.

Then the paper you gave me——

NORA.

He called it a formal acknowledgment. I knew you would tear it, of course: so I made him write it out twice. I've the other one here (*she points to her bosom*). Some day I shall send it to you.

PERCY.

Why?

NORA.

I may want a service, perhaps — who

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knows? Till then—Ah, Percy, Percy, what a love you threw away!

(*She goes quickly to him, flings her arms around his neck, kisses him passionately on the lips; then drops her veil, flits through the door and down the stairs, leaving* PERCY *standing there, completely dazed and stunned. Minutes go by: he scarcely stirs. After a time the other door, leading to the inner rooms, opens, and* MRS. HARDWICKE *appears.* PERCY *glances at her, but does not move.*)

MRS. HARDWICKE.

(*Consulting a paper that she holds in her hand.*) Ah, Percy, I thought you might still be up. And perhaps you are in a more reasonable frame of mind. I have been going into figures. I find that in order to pay ten shillings in the pound you will need——

(PERCY *bursts into loud and almost hysterical laughter*—MRS. HARDWICKE *looks up in surprise.*)

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PERCY.

[*Roughly.*] You needn't trouble!

MRS. HARDWICKE.

I beg your pardon?

PERCY.

Some one has been here and has left a message for you. I was to tell the stock-broker's daughter that I shouldn't need her money. Good-night!

(*He goes off, unsteadily, through the outer door:* MRS. HARDWICKE *stares, in utter bewilderment.*)

CURTAIN.

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MAGGIE

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MAGGIE

SCENE.—EDWARD MAGUIRE'S *rooms in the Temple. The massive oak doors open on to a narrow passage, that leads to three small rooms, all panelled in dark oak. The furniture—of which there is much more than the size of the room warrants —is piled against the walls without any attempt at arrangement; in the great book-case the books lie in the most extraordinary confusion, crammed in wherever there is room, while quantities of others are littered on the floor. Pictures and engravings are piled on chairs and tables, and are thick with dust.*

The windows are open, and admit the mild August air. It is close on two o'clock in the morning.

Heavy steps come up the stairs: the outer doors are unlocked, and EDWARD MAGUIRE *walks unsteadily into the flat, switching on*

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the electric light as he enters the sitting room. He is a tall thin man of forty-five, with a straggling reddish-brown beard and hair that is almost white. His face is very haggard, his mouth tightly drawn, his eyes very bright. As he comes in he mutters to himself——

Ouf! It's hot! What a climb up these four flights. Letters? One. (*He opens it.*) From Pritchard. Wants to know why I never send him any work. Why? (*He chuckles.*) Work! I haven't done a stroke since—since. . . . Not a stroke. Not a stroke. (*He leans out of window.*) How quiet it is, how quiet—not a sound! There goes the clock, ding-dong—Two, by Jove! Two—ah! (*He fetches a decanter of whiskey from a cupboard and pours some into a glass.*)—Gad, I wonder how much I've drunk to-night. This will be my tenth, twelfth, fifteenth! It has no effect on me any more—none. It's that beastly morphia that does it, I suppose. The worst of it is, it makes me so infernally stupid. At bridge to-night God only knows what mistakes I didn't make. I

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can't remember for the life of me how many trumps are out and what cards have been played. And the fellows never swear at me. Only I can see the uneasy looks when I join a table, and the man who has to be my partner stifles a groan. Well, I played for six hours at a stretch. Lost, of course. How much? (*He empties his sovereign purse into his hand, takes the money from his pocket, and pours it all on to the table.*) Money! Silver and Gold! "Just for a handful of silver he left us"—in my case just for a handful of gold, and the he is a she. . . . Stop that! Don't talk about her! Stop that, I say, you cursed fool! (*He rises and goes to the window again.*) Dead still everywhere. Not a sound. All the world asleep. So shall I be soon, with the help of my little needle. Worst of it is, I have to take more and more every night. And I dream—O God, how I dream! Always she, and she, and she! Her face, her eyes, her smile. . . . It's no good, old chap, I can't help it. I throw up the sponge. Not think of her? What in Hell am I to think of? Look

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at yourself, you darned idiot! What are you? Who wants you? who cares for you? Not think of her? Why, how long is it since she went away? Twentieth of April —it's the end of September now—twelfth or fifteenth—five months anyhow. Five months! A hundred and fifty days and nights—especially nights. . . . Have another drink, my boy; and look here—make it a stiff one. So-o-(*he pours himself out another drink, puts the glass to his lips, then suddenly flings it from him—the glass goes crashing to the floor*)—O God, O God, I can't bear it! I can't, I can't! It's no good; the machine's breaking down! Why didst Thou put this love into me if this thing was to happen? I had lived an honest life all these years, and done no man or woman any harm—then she came and loved me—I was lots of years older, but she loved me: and we married and went on our honeymoon. . . . I would go through all I've suffered since to live through those weeks again . . . Money! The other man wallowed in money. A stockbroker!

Where are they, I wonder? Italy, or

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somewhere. Asleep now, side by side . . . side by side! His head on the pillow, next to hers. . . . God! (*He goes to the cupboard, fetches another tumbler, fills it, and drinks.*) . . . Divorce, they all said to me: divorce, you fool, divorce. What for? *He* wouldn't marry her, that pink and white cockerel: and she's bound for the devil, anyway. I knew it from the start. A little fool of a woman—no thought in her head but dress and flirtation—never read a book or looked at a picture. A blamed little fool—and I loved her, and love her! There was a trick of her eyes and lips when she looked at you: and her hair, those masses of red-brown hair that fell over her shoulders: and, and——

That dream of mine last night . . . there she stood in the room talking to me . . . and I furious with her, calling her names, and she only smiling . . . and suddenly I knew it was a dream, and tried to wake, and couldn't . . . and she laughed, and came close to me, so close that I felt her breath; and she said something I have forgotten . . . and I lay

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staring at her, unable to move . . . and then I thought I woke, and I stretched out my arms to her, but she ran out of the room, saying something again—I wish I could remember what she said: and then she came back, popped her head in at the door, and gave me one more look—the old look that I would damn myself for—and went, and closed the door. I heard her feet tripping along the passage—and then I woke, and took more morphia. . . . What did it mean, I wonder? Was she thinking of me out there? O God, did she want me? Maggie, Maggie, Maggie! . . .

Half-past two. Time I went to bed. I can stay up till to-morrow week if I choose. Time I went to bed. Whiskey? What's the use? Double dose of morphia to-night. Great Heaven, I used it all up yesterday, and forgot! I haven't a grain! And the night before me!

Steady, Maguire, steady. . . . You're a little topheavy, you know, and this room's in the fourth storey. . . . Steady, my boy. . . . Suicide's the last thing, and there's always time. . . . Books, Balzac's

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"Contes Drolatiques"—what's the use, when you know I can't read? My eyes follow the words, but the mind's not there. Oh, that rotten ass, who told me to take morphia! I was ill and wretched, I scarcely slept, but at least my head was right. Now I am besotted—a wreck—a body without a soul. Pray? What's the use? There's one thing I want in this world, and that's Maggie. She is now, somewhere, with the other fellow. She will never come back. Oh, if I thought she would! If I could tell myself that some day, some day, the door would fly open, and she would be there, standing before me! . . . If I were rich—but my money's nearly all gone. In about six months I shall be a pauper. I can't work. I haven't touched a pen since she left. I can't string two words together. . . . Great Heaven, what have I to live for?

The decanter's full, thank God! That bottle stands between me and death. Think of it! Here am I, all alone, the loneliest creature on this earth—my one friend that bottle. And the little needle. But the needle has failed me to-night. How I

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loathe this stuff! I drink and drink. . . . If I had gone away, perhaps, to America, Japan—who knows?—I might have lived it down. . . . I came here, thought it a great stroke of luck to find these rooms, sat here day after day. . . . Then that ass gave me morphia, and Teddy Maguire was . . .

Was, yes. . . . And he might have been —something very respectable. I had power of a kind. I fell in love—married.—Oh my dreams, my dreams! A peaceful home, children, wife . . . and after six months off she goes. . . .

Was it my fault? Perhaps. I worshipped her, humoured her. If I tried to scold, she had only to look at me. *Was* it only the body I loved? *Had* she a soul? I loved—that's all. And the love burned into me—burns now—burns, burns—while she—oh, I always knew! She had no heart, none. Cruel—God, how cruel she could be! I was jealous, again and again. And she had only to come to me, stand by my side, put her arms round my neck—and I was at her feet again. . . . Oh yes, it was a good deal my fault. . . . But I was forty,

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and she twenty-two. And I trusted her. A flirt, of course—but I thought her loyal. And after all, she did love me once. Our honeymoon—those three weeks. . . . Ah yes, they were worth it all. . . . A night like this, and all the other nights, and the devilry of it and the black misery—those three weeks were worth it all . . . all . . . all. . . .

Quarter to three—ah, there's a cab going past. . . . So the world isn't dead. . . . There's a driver on the box, and some one sitting inside. Who is he, I wonder? I should like to have some creature in here to-night, somebody, anybody. . . . That light's flickering strangely. . . . Good Heavens, I hope it's not going out. . . . God, if I should be left alone in the dark! . . . No, it's all right, — it burns up again. . . .

It's no good taking any more whiskey. . . . I've half emptied the decanter. . . . Oh life, life! . . . Was it for this I was made! My poor old dad, he was so proud of me. . . . And my mother, how she loved me. . . . Thank God, I was a good son. . . . Are they near me, I wonder? Will

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they be waiting for me, when I cross? How sorry they will be—they built such hopes! But over there these things won't count. . . . Oh yes, I was a good son. That's why I married so late, I suppose. . . . Lived with the old people—happily enough, too. . . . When my first book came out, how the old lady collected the notices! Beamed when some ass praised me. "My son's work—my son says—my son is considered by the best judges to be—" Poor old lady, I used to get so angry! She loved me. . . . Oh yes, they'll be waiting for me over there. . . .

Literature! My ambitions! I had something to say, eh? I was going to do something fine? Oh, the rottenness of it all! Four books over there, on a shelf—hundreds and thousands of articles that have been used to wrap up butter. Four books—and if they were forty! Here would I be, just the same. So easy to talk, and write. I was happy, too, in a way. And then I met her. . . .

I remember that white muslin dress she had on. I went home and said to myself,

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"Old chap, you've got it this time." And then when I saw her, at Folkestone—and we stood in the little hut there, for shelter from the rain—and suddenly I found I had my arms round her, and was kissing her, kissing her. . . . "Will you marry me, Maggie?" "You are too good for me," she said: and she cried. . . . She was right. I should have married a wife like Manger's. . . . A clear, steady-eyed woman, who would have borne me lots of children. . . . But then I loved this one. And how proud she was, that evening at Parmenter's, when I read my play, and Parmenter jumped at it . . . how proud she was. . . . And she nestled close to me in the cab driving home. . . . And we had a little supper, just she and I. . . . "My Teddie is a great man," she said, "and I am his little slave." . . . I can see her sipping her glass, and then giving it me to sip . . . that low-necked pale blue dress—that I thought too low . . . and then she went to her room, and came back, with her hair all down, and sat on my knee with her arms round my

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neck, and I was too happy for words—O God, how I remember!

If the play had been a success—who knows? We were going to make a fortune. Parmenter swore by it. A fortune for you, he said, and a fortune for me. I was to give her a diamond necklace. We went to Tiffany's and picked one out. She was to have a carriage. We saw the house we meant to take. We worked out how much the play would bring in, running three hundred nights. . . . And then, in the theatre, the dead, chilling silence. . . . Not a hand when the curtain fell. . . . I tried to smile. . . . The boos from the gallery. . . . And it wasn't a bad play either. . . . And when we got home she hadn't a word for me. . . . "I'll do better next time," I said, "Maggie." . . . "Travers told you that act was wrong," she said. . . . Travers! That silly jackass, Travers. . . . "If you had taken his advice—" . . . And I can see myself now, sitting down, feeling as though something had snapped. . . .

Yes, that was it. . . . If I had been

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famous, successful—and I should have, in time, if she had stood by me. . . . And here I am now, crushed to the ground, because a heartless jade of a woman has left me. Yes, a heartless jade. A mere pitiful coquette: a thing fair enough outside, but only foul mud within. A worm, a snake, a toad: the lowest, vilest type of sensual woman: and oh my God, how I adore her!

God, God, I adore her! God, I can't live without her! I can't live, I can't live! It's all black, everything is black, I haven't a ray of hope. I can't read, I can't think: it's all Maggie, Maggie and morphia. And when I wake, and find I am holding my own hand, and not hers! Maggie, Maggie! Will it say anything to you when you hear I am dead? Do you remember those three weeks of ours? No, you have had a second honeymoon. During these five months, while I have been slowly killing my brain, you have lain in his arms, and kissed his lips. God, God, why hast Thou done this to me? . . .

Three. The night drags on. That's

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the policeman's step on the pavement. It will be light in an hour. One hour more —then daylight. Daylight! Another day! What difference does it make to me? To-morrow is yesterday. . . . How many more days shall I spend, like this? . . . There is not a sound anywhere—the silence is awful. . . . I've a curious feeling in me. . . . I'm growing afraid, afraid. . . . Afraid of what, you fool?—My God, something's happening in me!—Tush, self-control, self-control. . . . It's only the machine that's a bit cranky, Maguire—the machine, that's all. *I'm* steering it, you know. I—I—what am I, after all? What does it mean? All alone in this world—the loneliness is too awful—I can't stand it, I can't stand it! Is this real? Am I dead already? Is my brain going?—Ah, a cab! . . . Oh, thank God! . . . That's all right, I'm better. . . . A nasty little attack. . . . There are two of me somehow . . . and one is always saying, "Out of the window, you fool!" . . . But I won't. . . . It wouldn't even be death, perhaps. . . . Oh no, if I mean to do it, it shan't be that

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way. But I won't do it. I'll live: yes, live: and fight this down. I will; yes, I will; I: *I.*

Suppose I went into a home for a bit? My head's all right—it's only my nerves that are wrong. Nerves, that's all. This morphia has done it. Why not go into a home? Three months there, and I'd be all right. . . . I'd knock off this stuff, and in course of time I'd sleep naturally again, and forget . . . all.

Hush! wasn't that a footstep? I'll swear that curtain moved. . . . You wretched idiot, what now? Some new dodge? Haven't you got enough? Must you invent fresh misery? . . . I almost believe I could sleep. Shall I try, I wonder? . . . Yes, I think I'll do that. To-morrow first thing I'll go to a doctor. He shall send me to a home, or to some medical man with a cheerful family. . . . Why not? Why should I knock under? Why give in? There's stuff in me, isn't there? Well? My memory's gone, but only for some things. And that's merely because the morphia makes me stupid. Knock

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off the morphia, and I shall be just the same as I was. Just the same. And there are lots of people who are fond of me, only I won't go near them. There's little Mrs. Maginnis—I believe that I—no, that won't do. No debauching of friends' wives, because my own has left me. But who knows? I may find some woman sometime who will care for me, some one without a tie, who may join her loneliness to mine. Why not? There must be heaps who are yearning as I yearn. . . . Why does that curtain move? . . . Oh, of course, the window's open. . . . There's a little wind. . . . What a nervous ass I am! Nerves. . . . What a curse nerves are.—Yes, I think I'll go to bed. . . . And to-morrow I'll turn over a new leaf. Another glass of whiskey? That's no good. I'm pretty well sodden. . . . I should have gone to a woman when this thing happened, instead of to a man. A woman wouldn't have put me on to morphia. She would have felt for me. At least some women. My sister only said I was well rid of her—that she always

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knew she was that sort. That didn't help me. But there are some women — like that sweet wife of Macalister's—ah, if I could have gone to her, and told her! She's in India unfortunately. If I could have gone to her, she would have put her hand in mine, and not said a word, and I would have wept like a child. And she would have allowed me to go there often, and sit with her. . . . That would have done me a world of good. . . . Only a woman can help you. . . . And she is in India. . . . God bless her, all the same!

That curtain's still moving. . . . I'll close the window. It makes no difference. . . . There's not a doubt about it—it *is* going up and down. . . . Good God, then my brain's playing me tricks! Am I as far as that? I won't look at it. . . . I shall be seeing things soon. . . . Tush, it's only fancy. . . . Now, steady, we'll go up to it—so—now, look at it squarely. That's all right. . . . It was only your fancy. . . . This beastly habit one gets into, night after night, of talking to oneself.

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. . . Bah, I'll go to bed. The quarter's gone — it's nearly light already. . . . I'll go to bed.

Go to bed? What's the use? Better lie here on the sofa. It'll be light in an hour . . . before that. . . . And then to-morrow—yes, yes, I'll take myself in hand. After all, one is a man. What did I tell that little fool when he came whining to me about the girl who wouldn't marry him? There are heaps of pretty girls on the Brighton parade, I said. Well, and why not I? One woman or another? What an ass I've been! Why, good Heavens, what have I to remember? Pain, pain, pain. She never opened her mouth but she said something to wound me. The old pals of mine who wouldn't flirt with her never came to the house again. She hated their wives—they were too dull. And that day, when I found her trying on the necklace . . . she hid it as I came in. . . . Lies, lies, lies, we wallowed in lies. . . . O the Jezebel, the jade, why didn't I wring her neck? . . . And three days afterwards she had gone—gone—with the

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other man! Well, there she is—going to Hell her own way. . . . Let her go!

Let her go, yes. . . . I'll turn over a new leaf. . . . Have a divorce perhaps. . . . Why not? . . . You see, old chap, you're all right now. . . . Am I? Am I all right? Let her go? Not see her again? Never see her? Maggie, Maggie! I must, I must! Oh, why didn't I go after them, and find them, and tear her from him! I am strong, I would have killed him. I would have taken her in my arms—I would have forgiven her. In my arms, Maggie, Maggie, Maggie! . . . After all, what can I do? There I am, tied to her. It's no use struggling; it's no use. I have her in my flesh, in my blood. Every heartbeat shouts out her name. Those laughing devil's eyes of hers are always shining within me. . . . There goes that curtain again. . . . Oh for some morphia! . . . I can't stand this. . . . It's all coming back. . . . I can't stand it, I can't stand it. . . . If I only had a dog in the place, something that lived! . . . Shall I knock up the man opposite? . . . It's vacation time—he's not there. . . . I

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must do something—I'll go downstairs, talk to the policeman—I can't stop here. . . . Wait: didn't I lose a phial of morphia? Yes, yes, I did. . . . It may be in the study: in my jacket there—I have never looked. . . . O God, God, if I am to live this night, let me find that phial of morphia!

(*He goes into the study, and switches on the light; the first thing he sees is a rifle standing against the bureau; a note is stuck on the bayonet.*)

Eh—what? A rifle? Is this . . . no, there it is, solid, substantial, waiting for me. . . . Waiting for me. . . . How did this come here? Ah, a letter. . . . "Dear old chap, just back from America. Hunted you up everywhere; only got your address to-day. Shall call to-morrow at ten. You won't mind my leaving my rifle here? I'm a member of the Inns of Court Volunteers . . . not going home to-night. . . . Don't play with the thing, it's loaded . . . Jack."

Ha, ha, ha! Jack? Who the devil's Jack?—Jack, whoever you may be, you have shown me the way. . . . Wait. . . . We'll see first. . . . Is there any morphia?

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. . . Not in this pocket—or that . . . or that. . . . No—no morphia. . . . Only the rifle. . . . That is the answer . . . the rifle. . . . Oh God, *is* that the answer?

Shall I? Oh, I'm not asking *you*. I'm asking myself, not you. Shall I? After all, why not? Come here, my friend. . . . Wait, let us think. . . . I am forty-one. In a year I should be all right perhaps, who knows? If I go to a home I shall get cured. . . . Death, death . . . and what comes after. . . . No, no. . . . Not that way . . . no. . . . Here, I'll put this thing back. . . . Yes, stay there, stay there. . . . Not that way for me, no. . . .

Hark! My God, hark! She is calling me! Again! . . . Maggie, Maggie, where are you? (*He rushes wildly to the door, flings it open, there is no one.*) I heard her, heard her plainly. . . . She called me, she called me! She is dead perhaps, out there. . . . Maggie! Ah, the rifle, the rifle! Quick, quick. (*He seizes it.*) Maggie! (*He presses the trigger—the shot goes through his heart, he falls an inert mass. The day slowly dawns. . . .*)

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A MAKER OF MEN

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A MAKER OF MEN

SCENE.—*A little sitting-room in a small house in a far-away street in West Hampstead. It is evening: the lamps are lit and the curtains drawn.*

The furniture is very simple, its most prominent feature being a cottage piano, which fills a corner; but everything in it, from the chairs upwards, is good of its kind, carefully chosen, and blends harmoniously with its neighbour. The books on the shelves, the wall-paper on which hang good photographs of Rembrandt, da Vinci, and Velasquez, the flowers on the table and mantelpiece, the few bits of old china, brass and pewter, combine to invest the little room with a pleasant atmosphere of refinement and culture.

CUTHBERT FARRINGDON *and* EDITH, *his wife, are its only occupants. He is a man of forty-two, of medium height, with*

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an eager intellectual face. EDITH *is ten years younger, a deep-chested woman, with a magnificent figure. Her face is strikingly handsome; the large grey eyes are sunk rather deep, and the extraordinarily long lashes almost throw a veil across them. Her dress, cut a little low at the neck, and with sleeves bare to the elbow, is exceedingly simple, but of excellent taste and design.*

EDITH *is sewing, seated in an arm-chair by the table:* CUTHBERT *paces the room nervously.*

CUTHBERT.

Only nine! How the minutes crawl! It seems hours since dinner. Surely the post is late to-night?

EDITH.

No, dear, the hour's just striking. A quarter past is the usual time. Are you sure you'll hear to-day?

CUTHBERT.

Maxwell promised—and he's a man of his word. As soon as the directors rise,

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he said, I'll pencil you a note. A good fellow, Maxwell—he'll do what he can for me, I know.

EDITH.

Well—in about ten minutes——

CUTHBERT.

Yes: we shall know our fate. Oh, this means such a lot to me!

EDITH.

[*Gently.*] Cuthbert——

CUTHBERT.

You think me too sanguine, of course, and all that. But every man in the office is certain that I shall be chosen. Maxwell himself told me that there wasn't much doubt. And, remember, this is the last branch the bank will open, for years. They've been going ahead too fast as it is—it's my last chance. But what a chance! Here am I, at forty-two, getting three hundred and fifty a year. As manager at Croydon I shall have six hundred, and any amount of

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possibilities. And such a house! Edie, you'll love it.

EDITH.

We've been very happy here . . .

CUTHBERT.

Oh yes, but poor—grindingly poor. We've had to weigh every penny. Now we shall be able to afford a stall in the theatre once in a way—cabs—a little supper at a restaurant. We've been such mice, so far! And it means another servant for you, and less drudgery. Oh, I tell you, I ask nothing more in life. I'll say, like Malvolio, "Jove, I thank thee!"—Isn't it strange that postman doesn't come?

EDITH.

Don't be so excited, dearest—Mr. Maxwell may have forgotten——

CUTHBERT.

He never forgets—he's the soul of punctuality and order. Oh no, he's written! The letter's in the postman's bag—Heaven,

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to think of it! I'll make that Croydon branch a success, I can tell you. I've got the stuff in me.

EDITH.

Don't build on it too much, dear Cuthbert—you don't know what the directors may do——

CUTHBERT.

They *may* pass me over, of course, but I don't think it likely. There's only one other man in the running—Pegwell. And Pegwell's my junior by three years. He's a smart chap, but he's my junior, and the directors are very conservative. It's pretty long odds on me. Oh, if it doesn't come off—if it doesn't—don't be afraid, Edie, I'll bear it like a man.

EDITH.

I'm sure of that, Cuthbert.

CUTHBERT.

I really don't care for myself—it's for *you* that I want it—for you. We've been

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married nine years; and a poor time you've had of it! You, the prettiest of the three sisters — and see how the others have married!

EDITH.

[*Smiling.*] Do you think I'm dissatisfied?

CUTHBERT.

Ah, with your maid-of-all-work, and the three children upon your hands the whole of the day, you must often and often have wished—oh, never mind that now! It's over—I know that it's over! Six hundred a year, *and* a house—that's equal to seven hundred and twenty. And there are big opportunities — as the bank prospers, the manager prospers with it. Ah, Edie, no more sitting up late in the night sewing and darning, and having to make your own dresses——

EDITH.

That's not a hardship; and does my lord think that I dress so badly?

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CUTHBERT.

You! Is there anything you do badly? That dress you have on to-night—it's my favourite too——

EDITH.

I put it on for you, this being a special occasion, for good or for ill. That's a thing that's so sweet about you—you notice what one has on. Most men wouldn't.

CUTHBERT.

Most men, poor things, haven't wives like mine.—Hark! That's the postman's knock next door. . . . Confound him, what is he waiting for? Do we pay him to stand on the doorstep and gossip? . . . Here he comes, here he is. . . . I'll let the girl bring it in . . .

EDITH.

[*Rising and throwing her arms round his neck.*] Cuthbert——

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CUTHBERT.

[*Disengaging himself gently.*] All right! Don't be afraid, dear. . . . If the news is bad I shall stand it. . . . Sit down. . . . Why doesn't that girl bring the letter? Can't she tear herself from her wretched novelette? . . . Ah, there she goes—at last! . . . She's taken it out. Ah! (*A knock.*) Come in!

(*A trim little maid enters, with a letter on a salver, which she gives to* CUTHBERT, *who takes it and balances it feverishly in his hands. She turns to* EDITH.)

THE MAID.

Oh, if you please, m'm——

EDITH.

[*Pleasantly.*] Not now, Mary. To-morrow——

(*The maid goes.* CUTHBERT *walks to* EDITH, *and gives her the letter.*)

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CUTHBERT.

Here, you open it, Edie. Our fate's in there. Let me have it from you.

EDITH.

Oh, how I hope the news will be good!

(*Without haste or excitement she opens the envelope; there is a small pencilled note inside; she glances at it and lets her head fall.*)

CUTHBERT.

[*Drops of perspiration pouring down his face.*] Edie!

(*She holds out her hand to him; he strides towards her, takes the letter, and reads it.*)

CUTHBERT.

[*Hoarsely.*] Regrets . . . Pegwell . . . ah . . . Oh, all right . . . I might have known. . . .

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EDITH.

[*Rising, with outstretched arms.*] Cuthbert!

CUTHBERT.

[*Impatiently, moving away.*] All right. . . . I'm all right. . . . It's frightfully hot in here, isn't it? Do you mind if I open the window?

(*He flings the sash open, and stands there, his back turned to her.*)

EDITH.

You'll catch cold. . . .

CUTHBERT.

[*Closing the window with a bang, and coming into the centre of the room.*] Pegwell! Of course! I might have known!

EDITH.

Has he any influence?

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CUTHBERT.

Perhaps. It may be. My luck! My cursed luck!

(*She goes to him, he breaks away, and walks feverishly to and fro.*)

CUTHBERT.

It was my last chance. Here I am, with three hundred and fifty a year, rising twenty pounds annually till it reaches five hundred. Eight years—I shall be fifty then. And at sixty they pension me off; and we spend the rest of our days in some wretched little country cottage. That's our future. I'm done—finished——

EDITH.

[*Gently.*] You said you'd be brave.

CUTHBERT.

One man after the other has passed me: and I started pretty well, too. A clerk in a bank, of course—but there were opportunities. Now I'm shunted—stuck in a

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siding for the rest of my life. Edie, you've married an ass, and that's the plain truth of it.

EDITH.

We know better, you and I.

CUTHBERT.

I'm a failure—a rank, rotten failure. Oh yes, I am: I know it, and you know it. We used to think—I did, at least—that I was no end of a clever fellow. I had my theories, my ideas—I was going to write a book on banking that was to astonish the world. My dear, that book will never be written.

EDITH.

Oh yes, it will!

CUTHBERT.

Never. There's piles and piles of MS. shut up in that drawer: and you, poor darling, have listened to the dull stuff over and over again—but there's nothing in it. I'm like all dull men—I've a glimmer of an idea—but when I try to express it, it

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eludes me. That's the truth. I fancied myself above the average—the fact is, I'm below it.

EDITH.

I'm no fool; I've a fairly clear intellect and a fairly sound judgment. I believe in you; I believe in your book; I believe in your future.

CUTHBERT.

My future! Ah, Edie, it isn't really favouritism that has put these other men above me—men who were my juniors. It's because they were better men than I. I've known it in my heart a long time. And I'll tell you something else—that I've been ashamed to tell you before. I had a great chance—three years ago. Never mind how—it would take a long time to tell, and it's an intricate banking matter—but one of our biggest clients was swindling us, and I might have found it out. I didn't. No one could blame me, of course—I had done all my routine work well enough—but there it was.

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EDITH.

Did any one else discover it?

CUTHBERT.

No, but I might have. It's like the born whist-player, who divines what his partner holds. The bank was let in for a hundred thousand. And the maddening thing is, that I had a vague suspicion. But I just lacked the something—in point of fact, the brain. No one blamed me — no one could blame me—everything was right, as far as I was concerned—but Fortune had knocked at my door, and I wouldn't open. The directors said nothing, of course—what could they say?—but that's why I've been passed over, and am passed over to-day. I hoped they'd forgotten—they haven't. There—I've got it off my chest. I shall be a wretched bank clerk for the rest of my days. I've made a hash of my life—and, what's worse, of yours.

EDITH.

Finished?

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CUTHBERT.

Yes—I've said my say: now you know all about it. Now you see what sort of man you've had the bad luck to marry.

EDITH.

[*Gently.*] I'm afraid I'm not as sorry for myself as I should be.

CUTHBERT.

Ah, of course, you won't admit it! But when I look at you now—why, with all the hard work, and slaving, and the three children, you're as pretty to-day as you were when I married you——

EDITH.

You dear!

CUTHBERT.

You manage to dress on tuppence a year, and look as though you were turned out in Bond Street; you're a splendid musician; you find time to read and to think of what you have read; in fact, you're a remarkable

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woman, and you deserved to marry a man who was worthy of you——

EDITH.

Like Tom?

CUTHBERT.

Why not? Hilda can't hold a candle to you—and *her* husband has ten thousand a year!

EDITH.

A house in Park Lane, a shooting-box in Scotland, a yacht, a motor-car, *and* a most shocking temper.

CUTHBERT.

That's all very well! Edie, Edie, you must have said these things to yourself many a time!

EDITH.

Every day after lunch.

CUTHBERT.

You've never murmured, of course, or

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complained—it's not your way. But that's what galls me. There was the golden chance—I let it go by. Ass, ass! And you, my poor darling, denied every luxury, every trifle that sweetens life!

EDITH.

. . . You needn't be sorry for me . . .

CUTHBERT.

For whom else? *I'm* all right. I go out in the morning, come back at night, and there you are, waiting for me, always the same, always with a smile on your lips. But how have you passed the day? The little dinner's ready—as dainty a dinner as a man could desire—but who has cooked it? You. What have you done during those long and tedious hours? You have been with the children, all the time with the children. You have been teaching, dusting, darning, sewing, mending. On whom does the burden of our wretched poverty fall? Not on me. On you.

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EDITH.

[*Very gently.*] You need not be sorry for me, dear Cuthbert.

CUTHBERT.

Ah, but I am! When I think of your sisters, the lives they lead! When I see other men getting on in the world! And I—what have I done? Nothing!

EDITH.

You have made a woman love you.

CUTHBERT.

Oh, and I'm grateful! If I hadn't that! But I've a terrible fear at times that there must be something of pity in that love, Edie—something, almost, of contempt.

EDITH.

Cuthbert! Pity, contempt! If I had not the deepest respect and admiration for you, there could be no love. You must

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not say such things: you must not think them. Not for an instant. My life is the same as that of millions of women, but most husbands are satisfied, and say that is all a woman is fit for. You have shared every burden of mine, as far as a man could share it; and therefore it has been no burden, but only a labour of love. You have given me all that a man can give to his wife, except luxury; and that I don't need.

CUTHBERT.

Put it as you will, my poor child, it's drudgery all the same, monotonous, incessant drudgery; and why should you be a drudge, you? Why should you have to bear all the labour of the house?

EDITH.

Ah, the dear little house! I look after it, yes: it's my toy, my plaything. So much of it is the work of my hands and yours! There's not a pretty thing in it that does not stand for happy walks in the evening, when we pondered and hesitated,

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could we afford to buy it, or no. This wall-paper that we put up ourselves, the bookcase, the brackets you carved, the curtains I made—oh, Cuthbert, this house is so intimately of us, so truly our home, that it would have wrung my soul to leave it! We came here together after our honeymoon — we have lived in it ever since — and I thought we had both been happy . . .

CUTHBERT.

Because of you, always you! Your management, your pinching and scraping, of which I see nothing! Just think what you might have done with the extra money!

EDITH.

It would have been pleasant, of course—but, after all, are we so badly off? We live comfortably, we put a little by every year, we give our mite to the poor. . . . Cuthbert, you have hurt me to-night——

CUTHBERT.

[*Anxiously.*] Edie!

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EDITH.

Yes, you have hurt me. Why depreciate yourself? That wounds me. What if you do lack the faculty some men possess of making a great deal of money? Is money everything? And shall you hang your head, call yourself a failure, because this appointment has gone to another man?

CUTHBERT.

I was his senior, you see — I had a claim——

EDITH.

And then? It's for me you are sorry, you say. Do you think *I* care? When we play our duets together, when we talk of the books we have read, don't you think I value that more than if you made millions, and. when you came home, could speak of nothing but stocks and shares? Oh, be as ambitious as you like—and you have power, you can do far more than you think —but within these four walls, in our home, you, husband and father, have achieved a

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great deal. A very great deal. And you must not think otherwise. I will not endure it.

CUTHBERT.

Edie——

EDITH.

No, I will not endure it! Ah, I know Hilda shakes her head, and talks of poor Edie! She calls me one-eyed. I never have "a good time," she says. A good time! Do *I* want to invite smart young men to tea, do that dreary daily round of the park, and talk scandal with other women? Do I yearn to play bridge and ping-pong? . . . Don't be sorry for me, Cuthbert.

CUTHBERT.

Oh, Hilda's not so far out! Your life is all work—work, work, from morning till night. And what can I do for you?

EDITH.

Nothing but love me. We love each other, you and I. We are not like some husbands and wives, who think a holiday

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no holiday unless they spend it apart. We don't want to flirt with other men and women. You don't see my wrinkles—you don't notice that my complexion has faded——

CUTHBERT.

It hasn't!

EDITH.

You see? Your love throws a kind of glamour around me. Nothing in this world gives a woman more happiness than that. You are not only my husband — you are my lover. I look forward to your coming, night after night, as eagerly as in the first days. You give me the same little attentions and courtesies as when we were engaged. I try to dress prettily, to please you. I make my own dresses, and the work is pleasant, because it is done for you. We love each other; and in this great, foolish world, that is the one thing that counts. Is it not?

CUTHBERT.

Yes, yes, my darling, yes! But still you can't think how glad I should have been

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to be able to relieve you a little! To give you a little more leisure! Have a nurse, so that at least you might be spared the children about you all day!

EDITH.

The children?

CUTHBERT.

The appalling weariness of it! From morning till night! Ah, you've said nothing of them!

EDITH.

Hush, hush. . . . No, I have said nothing of the children, your children and mine, the children you gave me, our three sons . . . I spend the whole day with them, yes, and day after day; I have no nurse, and desire none. . . . Some women may consider this drudgery. Let them! *I* am your children's nurse, I am their mother: when they came into the world they lay on my breast and I fed them: they are mine, all mine and yours: no one came between us. And as then I nourished their body, so do

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I now feed their heart and brain on all that is best in me . . . I give what I have . . . I teach them, they teach me more. . . . I watch their tender minds throw out shoots, day after day: I watch them expand, develop. . . . They need me: and I am there, I give. . . . These three sons of ours, yours and mine, shall, God willing, grow into fine, noble men; and shall I not have done my very good part? Am I to be pitied, do you think, I who make men?

CUTHBERT.

[*Wonderingly.*] Edie!

EDITH.

I with my husband and children, with my rich, full life! I, the happiest woman on earth!

CUTHBERT.

[*Throwing his arms round her.*] Edie, Edie!

EDITH.

[*Rising, and placing her hands on his shoulders.*] The happiest woman on earth! Are you not the real husband, the lover,

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the one man who has made my heart beat? Is your kiss not as sweet to me to-day as it was in our honeymoon? I loved you before our children were born—how much more do I love you now, in them and through them! . . . Cuthbert, Cuthbert, let us never speak of these things again. They are too sacred. You were unhappy —I have let you look into my soul. And, oh my dear one, let us be content with this great joy of ours, and ask nothing more, lest what we have be taken; and nothing the world has to offer could atone for what we have, we two . . . our children, our great and wonderful love. . . .

(*For a moment they stand face to face, looking into each other's eyes: then* CUTHBERT *kisses her almost reverently on the lips, and* EDITH *returns to her chair and resumes her sewing.*)

CURTAIN.

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